



Increasing equity in financial approaches to open access: *draft for comment*

INDEX (click on headings to 'jump' to the relevant section)

Introduction & Scope	Pgs 1, 2
Headlines	Pgs 3, 4
Definitions	Pg 5
Details	Pgs 6 - 18
• Goal #1: All Scholars	6, 7
• Goal #2: Pricing	8, 9
• Goal #3: Transparency	10 - 12
• Goal #4: Fees & Waivers	12 - 15
• Goal #5: Workflows	15 - 18
Acknowledgements	Pgs 18 - 20

Introduction & scope of this work

Open access (OA) publishing is about disseminating the work of people. Not nations, not institutions, not organisations, but individual researchers and author groups. OASPA's work on [Equity in OA during 2023](#) showed that per-publication charges applied at scale and as a dominant route to achieving OA, are often problematic for researchers. Author-facing charges (as well as OA agreements and transformative/read & publish agreements that are centrally negotiated with libraries) favour select authors at select institutions, and present barriers to many scholars across all countries, regardless of Gross National Incomes, regional statistics or economic and R&D indicators.

We believe that a successful transition to OA is one where everyone can read and publish OA, and for these reasons, OASPA is now consulting the scholarly communications community on draft recommended practices to increase equity in financial approaches to OA.

We know that dissolving financial barriers to participation in OA is only one aspect of equity - equity being a multifaceted concept that [goes beyond equality](#) to address all issues of cumulative advantage. This means that in

addition to addressing financial inequities, it is essential that future work addresses conscious and unconscious biases, and that we work together to enrich and improve engagement routes (formats, languages, representation, governance and more), so that all scholars, based anywhere, can have a voice and participate fully as a stakeholder with influence.

We also know that publishing is evolving against a backdrop of rapid change, with significant digital opportunities (data sharing, new models of publishing, infrastructure innovations and more) as well as challenges (misconduct, fabrication, predatory publishing and more). Themes of this sort, from preprints to papermills and repositories to research-data, deserve consideration but are not covered in this work.

For now, OASPA has found the problem of exclusion in access to OA publishing to be acute and deserving of specific attention (more background [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)), and our recommended practices focus on financial barriers impeding OA publishing.

We are therefore presenting, for consultation and comment from anyone with an interest:

- **OASPA's headline recommended practices** covering these five goals:
 1. *Enabling open access for all scholars*
 2. *Evolving pricing-practices*
 3. *Describing models and pricing with accuracy, detail and transparency*
 4. *Supporting more accessible models in the per-publication charge context*
 5. *Reducing burdens in OA publishing workflows*
- **Definitions** for the term 'waivers' and unfunded authors/researchers.
- **Details** - for each of the five headline goals, the 'details' section covers three aspects:
 - (i) suggested ways to adopt the practices;
 - (ii) examples that meet a subset of the recommendations; and
 - (iii) notes on how OASPA might, in the future, record or measure adoption.

Releasing recommendations to build equity in OA will be an iterative process from OASPA. We are sculpting this body of work based on community input. Given how broad, multifaceted and complex the subject of equity is, and given further work needed (beyond addressing financial exclusion of scholars), we expect to develop this work and add/modify recommendations over time.

Our [feedback form](#) invites your input and welcomes links to other resources, studies, evidence and further reading that you feel OASPA should be aware of as we build a framework of practices to increase equity in OA.

At over 6000 words these recommended practices are long and detailed. After revisions OASPA hopes to generate a checklist for the most objective aspects. This should offer a shorter, more engaging format.

Please read on for **headlines**, **definitions** and **details**, and [let us know what you think of these draft recommended practices](#) by 1st July 2024. Responses will be anonymised, and we are counting on your help to make these better. The revised version will then be released openly under an open and re-usable CC BY license.

Headlines

1. ENABLING OPEN ACCESS FOR ALL SCHOLARS



Publishing organisations, public and private research funders, and libraries/institutions can work together to build more equity in OA by increasing, normalising and prioritising OA models and funding/payment structures that enable (and sustainably finance) all scholarly outputs being published OA without author-facing fees to read or publish. Developing, fostering and preserving OA publishing routes and OA funding/payment constructs that are decoupled from per-publication charges will help enable open access for all scholars.

2. EVOLVING PRICING-PRACTICES



Publishing organisations that charge fees or rely on sales have an opportunity to respond to the need for stratified and differentiated pricing, across all models, to reflect geographic, affordability, organisational and disciplinary variations. Where reasonably required as a result of evolving pricing approaches, payers (funders and libraries) can make a difference by working with publishers to commit funding to support responsible and reliable OA publishing for content from all scholars in all world regions.

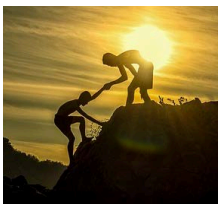
3. DESCRIBING MODELS AND PRICING WITH ACCURACY, DETAIL & TRANSPARENCY



Knowing *how* OA publishing is enabled and sustained, and *what* underpins pricing, will help libraries, funders and researchers make informed choices, and foster the trust needed to enable financial support for equitable OA. A simply stated and easy-to-understand description of the sales / cost-recovery method supporting immediate and permanent OA of published content is welcomed for all publications. Where multiple revenue-streams sustain operations, the mix of income/funding sources should be clear.

4. SUPPORTING MORE ACCESSIBLE MODELS IN THE PER-PUBLICATION CHARGE CONTEXT

This goal has two sub-sections:



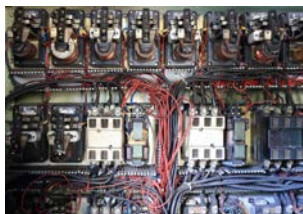
4a. SUPPORTING MORE OPEN ACCESS FOR SCHOLARS FACING FEES AND WAIVERS

Where APCs and per-article charges are used for OA journal publishing, a waiver policy that includes routes to attaining free or discounted OA publishing for *any* scholar in financial need (regardless of affiliation or geographic location) will be helpful.

4b. SUPPORTING MORE OPEN ACCESS WHERE WAIVERS ARE UNTENABLE

Providing fee-free or discounted publishing via waivers is unsustainable in some contexts, for example in book publishing that relies on per-publication charges. To increase equity in OA publishing where waivers are untenable or unscalable, leapfrogging complexities of improving the per-publication charge model is suggested per goal #1 seeking to enable OA for all scholars, including by decoupling OA publishing from per-publication charges. Where this is not possible, adopting practices recommended under other goals is encouraged.

5. REDUCING BURDENS IN OA PUBLISHING WORKFLOWS



Editorial and publishing workflows that clarify charges and waivers/discounts upfront in submission workflows, and minimise author-facing administrative and personal burdens are needed in APC/BPC models, and also where publishing-based OA agreements or transformative/ Read & Publish agreements are active. All other models of OA, including those that combine approaches or have a mix of income / funding models, also have scope to ensure researchers' publishing journeys are free from financial barriers and burdens in OA publishing.

OASPA recognises these recommended practices add a burden of effort (time, investment, human resources and technological development) to publishing organisations. There is a spectrum across which organisations sit at the moment, and OASPA knows that some aspects will be easier to progress than others. Funding for OA remains locked away in paywalled models, and payers' co-operation in engaging with and funding equitable OA publishing efforts is key to an ecosystem where all can read and publish OA.

With many examples already in play - some captured in this document - the corporations, companies, non-profits, societies, charities, universities and research funders that enable the system of scholarly publishing are well positioned to act.

Organisations experimenting or adopting aspects of this practice framework are invited to share feedback with OASPA so we can learn, iterate as needed, and convene constructive cross-stakeholder discussions to support positive change.

Definitions

Lack of common language was a recurring theme [when discussing how to make APC/BPC models more equitable in 2023](#). OASPA is proposing the below definition for waivers, emphasising both: their practical application in per-publication charge models of OA publishing, and their problematic nature.

OASPA is also distinguishing waiver policy from other special rates, discounts or zero-charge pricing policy that arises in circumstances that are *separate* to the matter of authors not having sufficient funds to cover OA publishing charges. With this, a definition for unfunded authors/researchers is also provided.

WAIVERS: OASPA is using this three-part definition for whenever we use the term waiver/s:

- In models where per-publication charges - commonly faced by authors - support OA publication of articles or books or chapters, waivers involve either a complete removal of, or a reduction in, the applicable OA-publishing charge. A partial-waiver involves some level of discount on the applicable APC or BPC. A full waiver is when the publishing charges are totally removed.
- Waivers therefore enable OA publication without any (or with reduced) publishing fees for authors who do not have access to funding (or those who have insufficient funding), to pay the applicable APC or BPC. Factors that make an author eligible for a waiver are not uniform across publishers, and scholars needing to prove eligibility (or prove neediness) in order to attain waivers, is problematic in various ways.
- Waivers are intended as an inclusionary practice in APC and BPC models of OA publishing. However, even where offered with sensitivity, the experience of seeking waivers can be patronising for recipients; waivers are associated with begging and 'hand-me-down' charity. The recipient has a feeling of being eternally grateful for the waiver provided. So, waivers are also a power relationship, and they maintain and reinforce systemic privilege in academic publishing.

Further reading and perspectives on waivers [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

UNFUNDED (author or researcher): OASPA is using this definition for whenever this term is used:

- In the context of OA publishing under APC/BPC models, and any model where fees are charged to authors, unfunded authors/researchers are cases where funding to pay is unavailable to an author or author group. This arises if it is confirmed that neither the authors' university / research organisation / place of work, nor the research funder directly or indirectly supporting the work, nor any co-authors, are able to cover or contribute towards publishing charges, AND, where no other relevant employer, sponsor or funder (including grant funding available to the authors) is prepared to contribute towards or cover the OA publishing charges.
- In the context of pure-publish / OA agreements or transformative agreements (TA), unfunded authors could also be those who meet the above criteria and are not affiliated with an institution that has signed an agreement with the publisher. Scholars based at an institution where a capped TA has 'run out' could also fall into this category.
- As a non-exhaustive list, unaffiliated or independent researchers, retired academics, early-career scholars between posts, and researchers whose research-funders/employers do not have the means to cover publishing charges fall into this category.
- An author / author group's unfunded status is not dictated solely by affiliations or geographic locations.

Details

1. ENABLING OPEN ACCESS FOR ALL SCHOLARS



The economics of scholarly publishing - both publishing and supporting/funding/paying for it, needs to be thought of and transacted in ways that support global inclusion, and address systemic issues of privileges and advantages. While the recommended practices in subsequent sections will help in the short term, OASPA believes that equitable OA will not be achieved *solely* by more waivers, better workflows, transparent financials or varied prices for scholarly publishing. Progress can be made via OA models that enable (and sustainably finance) all scholarly outputs being published OA without author-facing fees or per-publication charges.

Therefore:

- OASPA recommends normalising publishing where OA is the default status for all scholarly content/all article types without a requirement for per-publication charges.
- Stakeholders (publishing organisations, universities, libraries, research organisations and research funders) are encouraged to work together to ensure that authors do not face invoices and are not responsible for paying for OA.
- Only some publishers and select institutions/organisations have the capacity (and scale or quantity of outputs) to be able enter Transformative Agreements/Read & Publish deals and other centrally negotiated OA agreements crafted on the basis of per-publication charges. Funding flows supporting these forms of publishing arrangements can be adapted so that no author is at a disadvantage (in availing of OA publishing) as a result of their affiliation, or lack of affiliation, or their disciplinary focus or geographic location.
- All stakeholders are invited to engage in research, conversation and experimentation around approaches involving OA without author-facing fees or per-publication charges, and to participate in events, workshops and conversations (including internal-only conversations) considering routes to OA without per-publication validations or charges facing researchers.
- All organisations already using or supporting models free from per-publication charges are encouraged to prioritise the sustainability of their programs on these terms (rather than introducing or embedding support for author-facing or per-unit charges).
- Co-development of approaches between publishing organisations and payers is suggested as a constructive way forward.
- Transparency in model development and reporting back to the community on lessons learned from pilots, experiments and fledgling programmes are key to progress across the sector.

Examples as inspiration:

- The [Subscribe2Open community of practice](#) logs OA for current/future years' content [across nearly 200 journals](#) delivering (or intending to deliver) full OA without author-facing fees or per-publication charges. Participating publishers include university presses, commercial publishers, not-for-profits and learned societies - publishing content in multiple disciplines from the humanities and social sciences to biosciences, mathematics and other subjects.
- PLOS' [Community Action Publishing](#) model aims to cover the costs of selective OA journals by distributing costs, rather than have individual authors pay the high APCs required to cover the cost of selective publishing. Member institutions commit to a flat annual fee, and cost to publish is assessed based on publication needs of both corresponding *and* contributing authors. Revenue exceeding the community targets goes back to members at renewal.
- The Royal Society of Chemistry's (RSC's) [commitment to transition to 100% OA](#) clarifies that in doing so they will work toward "*a model where the author does not pay article processing charges*". Co-development with libraries to develop new models is as described in a presentation from the RSC within [this online seminar](#) from April 2024.
- A [multistakeholder group](#) convened in 2023 is working collaboratively to find ways to evolve away from APCs / per-article payments.
- PeerJ released an [Annual Institutional Membership](#) offering in 2023 with the stated aim of reducing and ultimately eliminating APCs.
- Bloomsbury is offering a library-facing collective-action model for books via their [Bloomsbury Open Collections](#) programme; as a result 10 monographs will be made OA in 2024 with no researcher-facing charges. Authors from low-income countries, unaffiliated authors, and early-career researchers, and authors who are otherwise unable to pay BPCs, are prioritised.
- [Central European University \(CEU\) Press](#), in partnership with the [COPIM project](#), is using the *Opening the Future* (OtF) initiative to progress towards a fully OA frontlist of books without author fees as a requirement.
- OA2020 has convened a [series of workshops on global equity in OA publishing](#) from the research funder/producer perspectives. Key goals include ensuring that funders and institutions (rather than authors) pay the costs for open access publishing services; and that spending on publishing should enable global OA by both readers and authors.

How will OASPA measure? There is no clear cut way to measure intent and consideration of evolution away from APCs/BPCs. OASPA expects that challenges will be faced by those experimenting with or delivering OA via routes that do not involve per-publication charges. We would like to hear from publishing organisations already using or considering points in this recommendation.

OASPA can measure progress, and will develop future rounds of annual membership-data collection to denote and report what we reasonably and meaningfully can. We count on the inputs and support of the OASPA membership and beyond to help enrich our thinking and efforts to build equity in OA.

2. EVOLVING PRICING-PRACTICES



Publishing organisations have the opportunity to embrace equity through evolution in pricing practices (including stratified and differentiated pricing) across all models, to increase global equity and broaden participation in OA.

Therefore:

- Engaging with stakeholder/payer communities can help the development of varied pricing, through the introduction of bands, tiers, options, or stratified and differentiated pricing, as your organization sees fit, to actively encourage and support the widest possible participation in OA publishing. This will:
 - Make the scholarly communication system more inclusive for all researchers; pricing approaches can acknowledge vast differences in affordability and ability to pay across affiliations, funding statuses, geographies, disciplines, available research funding, and other factors;
 - And/or, suit the particular needs of subject-area(s) served by your publishing activity as funding levels, formats, data types and other factors vary considerably across disciplines,
 - And/or make it fair, equitable and easy for payers (research performing, research funding and research-consuming organisations) to support publishing operations that enable all content to be published OA without per-publication checks or validations.
- In APC/BPC models, and also in any other models where per-publication charges may apply (e.g. centrally negotiated OA / publish agreements and transformative / Read & Publish agreements with libraries), stratified pricing structures are advised to complement and supplement (rather than eradicate) waivers *at the least* in order to maintain discretionary waivers as a route to OA for unfunded authors. This is because publishers may still be approached for waivers by unfunded researchers in any country. See also details under the waivers related points in goal #4.
- Stratification or differentiated pricing does not need to be country-specific only. For instance, the quantity of published content from affiliated authors and/or the type of institution (e.g. community / technical college vs PhD granting institution) should also form the basis for differential pricing. Differentiated pricing by article type may be another factor.
- Mitigating financial burdens that result from the effects of currency exchange-rate fluctuation will support economies in several world regions.
- If experimenting or piloting new pricing strategies, open reporting, so the community knows what is being piloted, how, and what the outcomes and learnings are, will be helpful to all stakeholders.

Examples as inspiration: Each of these meet some aspect(s) of the recommended practices:

- Considering affordability (or ability to pay), a differential-pricing example with an out-of-the-box pricing tool (and other inspiration for setting prices), has been developed by Information Power as part of a [consultation draft](#) proposed for improving equity in pricing for academic publishing. A revised version (developed in consultation with international consortia and libraries) is due for release later in 2024.
- The [Cambridge Open Equity Initiative](#) is a pilot running to 31 December 2024 from Cambridge University Press. It supports charge-free OA publishing, across full and hybrid OA journals, for authors in over 100 countries, with eligibility automatically established (based on country of author location) during the editorial process.
- In 2024, Elsevier is piloting a new [Geographical Pricing for OA model](#) with differentiated pricing based on Gross National Incomes (GNI) of different countries and has committed to revising this approach based on feedback.
- Among other factors, differential prices are based on the type of institution in the US for [supporting library membership from punctum books](#).
- The library-facing ACM open model was introduced following consultations with libraries. Pricing is based on, and allows for unlimited OA publishing for, the institutional output/publications from affiliated authors ([2024 bands and tiers available here](#)).
- The [PLOS Global Equity](#) model has tiered pricing based on an institution's output and geographical location. The tiering is transparently shared and visible to all, as is the cost recovery target. The price is tiered depending on size, published output and geographical location of the institution. In addition, authors based at institutions at [Research4Life](#) countries are automatically included, and do not face APCs.

How will OASPA measure? OASPA will refer to links and information available on publisher websites and/or participation in pricing transparency initiatives. Self-certification/declaration from publishers and/or general feedback (within the constraints of what is legal and proper) volunteered by consortia and/or libraries and institutions will also be welcomed.

3.DESCRIBING MODELS AND PRICING WITH ACCURACY, DETAIL & TRANSPARENCY



Information about how income/cost recovery works to enable OA in your publications, with up-to-date, transparent pricing and discounting (where fees are charged, or sales are involved), should be readily available and easy for anyone, including researchers and non-publishing-professionals, to understand.

Therefore:

- *How is OA publishing funded or paid for in your publishing operation?*

Regardless of model, it helps to be transparent and clear about how your OA content is financially supported. Your route(s) to enabling OA and process for supporting OA publishing should be publicly available on your websites, and easy to find. Labels (e.g., Gold OA, Diamond OA, R&P, S2O) can be confusing because practices carried out under such labels are not consistent across publishers. It is suggested that the model(s) be explained in one or two jargon-free sentences. Cost recovery methods and/or donor sources should be clear in no-fee charging titles. The nature of (all types of) fees facing any stakeholder should be clear and up-to-date for fee-charging titles in all types of business models.

- *What are applicable prices? Why? And/or what can you say about your publishing financials?*

Greater transparency is needed to build more trust in the system. In all models, it will help to be open about donors, revenue sources, and pricing - including, to the fullest extent possible, how and why prices, tiers, special rates and discounts are set as they are.

Detail is helpful in all models and the following 'good-better-best' framework is suggested:

GOOD if the type of charges and/or other incomes/donations/grants are clearly outlined. For instance:

- **For APC, BPC, collective, conditional, partnership and membership models:** ensure clarity and transparency of pricing and tiering, along with (where relevant and possible), details around funding targets and/or discounting. All charges, with full details of up-to-date prices, currency information, and means of making payments should be easy to find, regardless of whether charges apply to researchers, libraries or others. (See also suggestions regarding upfront and accurate availability of discounts and fee waivers under goals #4 and #5.)
- **For subsidy/grant/donor-based models,** ensure clarity and transparency around use of financial contributions, and clarify the nature of any governance stake (or similar or other benefits) that donors may receive, if relevant. It is important to understand the role of subsidies (either in cash or in covering operational costs) to provide a full picture of the costs of book/journal publishing.

- **For all titles or platforms using per-article /per-chapter or similar charges *in combination with other models to generate incomes***, present information about all revenues that supplement or contribute to incomes, including page charges, article development charges, submission charges or any other income sources. With this, clarify on your website(s) if and how you avoid double dipping (charging more than once for the same content on different platforms or under different business models). Where a mix of revenues or funding supports OA, this should be clear with evidence that content and services are not being charged for twice. Clarifying the complete mix of incomes that support OA publishing will denote an upfront and transparent approach and foster trust.
- **For hybrid/transitioning publishing** the transition plan towards full OA, or, conversely, the intention to retain paywalled publishing, should be evident on your websites.

BETTER if in addition, the basis/logic or principles underlying pricing / charges can be transparent, and if the existence and specifics of special deals and other agreements, including grant/donor sources or Read & Publish/transformational agreements are made transparent, (the latter, for e.g., using ESAC).

Prices in per-publication charge models are (most often) author-facing. This leads to additional requirements for clarity and accuracy of charges, waivers and discounts, and further work on per-publication charge workflows, to build more equity in these approaches. [Sections 4](#) and [5](#) below cover these waiver and workflow related points in detail.

BEST if in addition, losses/profits made can be declared, with a mention of what the surplus (if any) goes towards - e.g., shareholders or society-led educational activities or campus-based teaching programmes, etc.

Ethics note - The financial/economic model enabling OA publishing should be distinct and separated from editorial criteria, editorial selectivity (peer review / quality control processes) and scope of the publication. Any practices straddling editorial and financial functions should be avoided, or handled with care and in line with [principles of transparency and best practice in scholarly publishing](#) and [COPE's core practices](#).

Examples as inspiration: The examples given here meet certain aspects / a subset of what is being recommended:

- A table carrying [average cost per \(book\) title](#) is made available by Open Book Publishers who also update [their website](#) annually with figures for the most recent financial year.
- [EMBO financial transparency data](#) explains revenues and costs of publishing for the European Molecular Biology Organization; financial headlines including the surplus made from publishing is evident from [these graphics for 2022](#) and [latest data for 2023](#).
- The Royal Society's [transparent pricing policy](#) demonstrates how pricing is set confirming the avoidance of double dipping.
- EDP sciences released [this transparency report for its Subscribe2Open \(S2O\) program in 2023](#) clarifying revenues, costs and current deficit position of their mathematics portfolio (see pages 14, 15 and 16 of the report), and revealing the S2O renewals target applied to secure subscriptions to keep 2023 content open.

- The [Direct to Open](#) model from MIT press ensures [transparent](#) and [dynamic](#) fees, meaning, if total participation exceeds the financial goal, the Press reduces the fees for all participating libraries.
- Collective models facing institutions such as the [Library Partnership Subsidy program](#) from the Open Library of Humanities provides clarity about publishing costs and revenues, including [price banding details](#) and further information for payers, many of who fall under the supporter category (or facing those who may wish to take up [supporter membership](#) in the future).
- The [Journal Comparison Service](#) developed by cOAlition S uses templated data inputs about list prices for APCs, subscriptions (and more) from publishing organisations. This data is available, in a standardised and comparable format, for libraries, library consortia and research funders.

How will OASPA measure? OASPA will refer to links and information available on publisher websites, publisher self-assertions with links to websites, and/or participation in ongoing pricing-transparency initiatives.

4. SUPPORTING MORE ACCESSIBLE MODELS IN THE PER-PUBLICATION CHARGE CONTEXT



Progress towards this goal is focused on models involving per-publication charges and fees facing authors, particularly unfunded authors. This section therefore involves part ‘A’ where waivers are tenable, and part ‘B’ where waivers are untenable.

4A. SUPPORTING MORE ACCESSIBLE MODELS FOR SCHOLARS FACING FEES AND WAIVERS

Researchers, including unfunded / underfunded researchers in any country could have routes to publish OA in APC and transformative/Read & Publish models via strong, welcoming and clearly described waiver programs that cater to financial need. (See our [definitions](#) for unfunded and waivers.)

- **For journals using APCs or charging author-fees of any type (including hybrid-OA journals, wherever possible):**
 - Make clear who is responsible for payment - e.g., the Corresponding author only? Are multiple-author payments possible or expected? How can a librarian or funder or others pay if needed? In what currency and how can payments be made?
 - For titles charging author-fees of any type, a waiver policy should exist. Ensure websites carry clear and up-to-date pricing and waiver/discount information, including eligible / ineligible titles and program expiration terms.

- Clarify if (and how) you participate in [Research4Life](#)-based waivers or discounting for APCs/BPCs, and state any country-level or within-country institution-based exclusions or opt-outs.
- A discretionary-waivers policy that is independent of (and may be additional to) waivers based on author geography / country of affiliation will increase equity in OA in per-publication charge models. Discretionary waivers are needed so that a full waiver *or* fee support / discretionary discount can be sought and considered wherever and by whomever it is needed - irrespective of where in the world an author is located and their affiliation. (It helps to be mindful that authors outside of institutions striking Transformative Agreements/Read & Publish deals or OA agreements typically gain no access to OA publishing via these arrangements.)
- The discretionary-waiver and discounting policy is best applied as a supplement to any other geographically-based policy of waivers that may exist (e.g., waiving or discounting for Research4Life countries).
- Allocating budgets so that discretionary waivers can be granted will support more equity in your publishing program alongside steps recommended in [section 5](#) about messaging and workflows.
- As researchers themselves (and/or, their institutions) have an obligation to meet the fees (or some part of the fees) whenever they *can* afford them, specify how an author can seek to use these pathways to successfully achieve OA in a fair way. Include and define if conditions or criteria apply for being granted a waiver, and what the process involves. Include steps relating to evidence that may be required from authors, but, please note the very next point.
- Author-facing requirements for proving waiver-eligibility are needed to establish justification for the waiver/discount being granted. Being mindful of waivers upholding a power relationship and intensifying dynamics of cumulative advantage, it helps if policy and workflows avoid over-burdensome requirements (e.g., the application for the waiver to be a letter physically signed by all authors attesting lack of funds, or provision of copies of a physically signed letter from the authors' institution). Language on websites can be constructed and surfaced with sensitivity to the fact that it can be frustrating and confusing for scholars who lack funding to seek waivers / support for OA publication in per-publication payment models. See also the [workflow section](#) of these recommendations.
- Removal or reduction of publishing charges in the following circumstances do not count as full or partial waivers:
 1. No/reduced charges for invited submissions;
 2. No/reduced charges for authors based in certain countries;
 3. No/reduced charges for authors who are journal editors;
 4. No/reduced charges for authors who are members of a society that owns the publication in question;
 5. No/reduced charges for authors who are frequent reviewers;
 6. No/reduced charges for certain article types (e.g., review articles, newly launched article types, prefaces/editorials, news, book reviews, etc.);

7. No/reduced charges for newly launched journals, one or more years post-launch.
8. In separate but related cases - no/reduced charges because an OA publishing agreement or a transformative/read & publish agreement is active between the publisher and the (often corresponding) authors' institution.

Circumstances listed above are promotional / engagement / supplementary activities that are separate to, and should be distinct from, a publisher's discretionary-waiver or discounting policy facing unfunded and underfunded authors.

- **For hybrid/transitioning publishing**, greater inclusion is achieved if the option to publish OA is not withheld based on author affiliations, geographic location of authors, or type of funder and their associated publishing policies. To be more inclusive, and to actively support a transition from hybrid OA to fully OA, consider, to the fullest extent possible, the application of a waivers programme to your hybrid OA publications.
- It is important that authors and publishers **uphold integrity**; OASPA acknowledges that scholars should not take undue advantage of waivers when they *do* have access to funding. Educating scholars about support for OA publishing is not solely publishers' responsibility, but guidance from publishers on sources of available funds (e.g. from the library), will be helpful as many authors are unaware of some of the routes to APC funding (e.g., institution, place of work).
- Being transparent about the **volume of waivers** granted will help quantify and demonstrate support that your publishing programme provides towards OA publishing for all scholars. Declaring what share of per-publication pricing supports waivers and publication of content that is not typically supported on a per-publication basis can be helpful markers for payers and researchers.
- Some of these recommendations can create conflict with each other. Increasing equity in per-publication charge models is complex and imperfect (as discussed in OASPA [workshops #1](#) and [#3](#)). Where the incongruence is irreconcilable to an organisation, goal 1 of these recommended practices can be a more consistent and harmonious path towards increasing equity in OA.

Examples as inspiration:

- As an example of waivers extending across full and hybrid OA titles, Bioscientifica has a [geographic-based waiver and discounting policy](#) that extends across both APC-based full OA titles and hybrid journals. (Scroll down to the waiver section to view.)
- Separate from its [geographic-based waiver policy](#), SpringerNature has an additional waiver policy based on [financial need](#) for any author - although this only applies to fully-OA journals on the APC model.
- The American Geophysical Union (AGU) has a dedicated author-waiver fund for its fully OA journals, and provides details about applying (including what authors should expect in the editorial/submission system) on its [funding options](#) page (scroll to the bottom for 'option 4 - AGU waiver').
- The fully OA eCancer medical science journal does not charge a specific APC fee, but rather, uses a '[pay what you can afford](#)' model which is [free for those who do not have funding](#).

4B. SUPPORTING MORE OA WHERE WAIVERS ARE UNTENABLE

Where waivers are untenable (most commonly in BPC-based book publishing) a route to cover the cost of publication for unfunded researchers is often needed via wholly different approaches such as library membership schemes, collective action based models, Subscribe2Open type models, or combination strategies. These approaches may involve per-publication charges only where such funding is available.

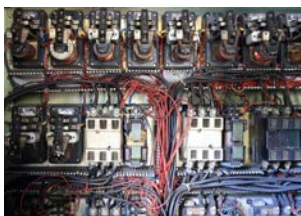
Where waivers are untenable, the recommendation is to shift towards models that are free from per-publication charges as outlined under goal #1, above, or, to adopt other recommended practices as listed in the rest of this document.

Example as inspiration:

- Open Book Publishers [use a mixed business model](#): no BPCs are charged, but if an author can access funding to defray the cost of publication, they are asked to do so. The availability or otherwise of funding has no bearing on whether or not the book is published, and most books published have no funding attached -- but BPCs are accepted if the funding is available. This means where book authors are in receipt of grants and have access to dedicated OA-publication funding, these authors are invited to help keep the publishing operation sustainable.

How will OASPA measure? Existence of (link to) a discretionary-waiver and other pricing policy information on websites for full OA and hybrid OA titles; self-certification from publishing organization that OA options are available without discrimination on the basis of affiliations, and that some budget is allocated towards waivers for unfunded researchers. Alternatively / additionally, commitment to adopt models that do not rely on per-publication charges.

5. REDUCING BURDENS IN OA PUBLISHING WORKFLOWS



Editorial and publishing workflows can be harnessed to minimise author-facing administrative and personal burdens in achieving OA. Accurate pricing, discounting and funding information on publisher websites will also support this.

For all models, and in all titles, the route to OA, and any actions needed from authors to enable OA, should be evident on publisher websites and available as part of the submission process. If no actions from authors are involved in achieving OA, it helps to clarify this upfront.

In per-publication charge models (APC and BPC models, as well as in transformative/Read & Publish and ‘pure-publish’ OA agreements, and also in cases with a mix of funding models that include author facing fees of any sort): particular attention is needed around cases where authors do not qualify for charge-free publishing - e.g., for unfunded authors in several scenarios; when a ‘capped’ transformative agreement/Read & Publish deal at an author’s institution runs out; or, also when an author is based *outside* of institutions striking these sorts of agreements and requires financial support.

Sub-section on waiver-related workflows: Some points here will overlap with items mentioned above. These matters are covered in multiple ways because increasing equity in per-publication charge models involves intersecting and overlapping activities across publishing operations, policy, messaging and workflows.

- It is recommended that information on waivers be proactively made visible to authors during submission and included clearly in any author guidelines and instructions.
- Publishers are asked for clear and simple processes and workflows for scholars to signal the need for waivers and/or fee-support mechanisms. Ideal if these are available to all researchers, regardless of geography or affiliation so waivers can be either automatically granted (where possible), or so that case-by-case and evidence-based decisions can be made with minimal lift from authors.
- Discounted rates, special rates or full waivers can be proactively applied by the publisher to the fullest extent possible to minimise researcher-facing burdens. This may require assistance from infrastructure and editorial-systems providers (where a publisher is not developing technology to manage publication workflows).
- Proactive, upfront messaging within submission-workflows (and downstream in the author journey), can clarify applicable charges/waivers in a tailored and relevant way by considering applicable discounts/waivers in all cases that are ‘rules-based’. For instance:
 - *“If following peer review and revision your article is accepted for publication you will not need to pay an APC in line with our waiver policy...”* or
 - *“This journal relies on article-publishing charges to enable OA. As you are a member of the Society of [xyz], you will face a discounted APC of X upon article acceptance”,* or,
 - *“No charges for OA publication will apply to your article as the [abc] library has embraced its role in supporting OA via an active agreement that covers fees centrally between [publisher] and your institution”.*
- All partial waivers (discounts), special pricing or full waivers that rely on consistent data that can reasonably be checked for or requested as part of the submission process*** can be applied without the need for additional requests, proof or other actions from authors. This saves authors from having to “prove neediness” (lack of funding for per-publication charges), or “prove eligibility” for a discount or waiver.

***Examples include: author affiliation based in certain countries, editorship, society-membership, affiliation with an institution that has a separate arrangement (e.g. OA-agreement or transformative

agreement) with the publisher, and all such scenarios where the publisher has the ability to modulate per-unit rates based on information provided at (or requestable at) the point of article submission for journals or manuscript / proposal submission for books.

- The success of proactive or automated messaging depends, of course, on accurate information being provided by authors. Use of persistent identifiers for author-affiliations and drop-down lists in submission workflows can mitigate errors and provide a basis (metadata) that supports automations and proactive messaging.
- Where eligibility confirmation involving action on the part of the author(s) is unavoidable, workflows and author-facing requirements can be constructed with sensitivity to the fact that proving need or lack of means in order to confirm eligibility for a partial or full waiver can be a deeply uncomfortable task, with both personal and administrative burdens. A 'Pay what you can afford' approach, or blanket policy to reassure that existence of a per-publication charge will not prevent the publication of good work which is unfunded or underfunded, can be constructive ways to manage this.
- Road testing your workflows on an annual basis will help check for possible improvements e.g. updating language, and ensuring that ongoing practice and author-facing messaging in your workflows is in line with the policy, pricing, discounting and waiver information described on your websites.
- Consider employing user testing with the intended audiences if possible. If you are interested in independent road-testing of your websites or workflows, please contact OASPA (email malavika.legge@oaspa.org) as we can help!
- Annual checks of your website(s) can be built into operational schedules to assure accuracy and consistency of listed pricing facing researchers. Ensuring that pricing and waiver information is kept up to date on external / third party sources will help because many librarians and researchers rely on sources such as [DOAJ](#) for this information (e.g., [here](#) and [here](#)).
- It is helpful to include up to date information about how pricing facing authors will change in the case of agreements that affect APCs or BPCs, such as transformative / Read & Publish deals, Publish-only agreements and other variants negotiated and signed with institutions, consortia, or groups like [EIFL](#).
- Researchers are more likely to visit journal/publication (rather than publisher) websites, so ensure relevant information on publishing charges, waivers and discounts is easily found at or from journal-level / title-level webpages.
- Information about pricing, discounting and waivers should be conveyed in simple language that is easy to understand, including for those with different first-languages to the language of your publications/platform. Multilingual information on submission guidance and charges associated with publishing can be helpful.

- It is essential that waivers/discounts processes are kept independent from and invisible to the editorial-selection process for your publication.
- Minimal library-facing administration (in evaluating OA agreements and approving per-publication charges) will help a wider range of institutions evaluate and strike agreements that support OA either without author-facing charges and/or without per-publication charges.

Examples as inspiration:

- A subset of OUP’s titles operate a geographic-based waiver and discount policy [that is automated and requires no separate action from authors based in certain countries](#) .
- eLife asserts that “it is very important that a publication fee does not inhibit the submission of excellent work from labs with insufficient access to funds” and all waiver requests are treated confidentially - editors involved in decision making about the content are not able to see waiver requests made. https://elife-rp.msubmit.net/html/elife-rp_author_instructions.html#fees
- The Biochemical Society’s journals automate the check for APC / no APC based on availability of an active Read & Publish deal, and proactively inform authors (through editorial workflows) if an agreement with an institution is covering the APC. More information under FAQ #6 [here](#).
- The Royal Society of Chemistry also operates automated checks for APC / no APC based on availability of an active Read & Publish deal, and proactively informs authors if an agreement with an institution is covering the APC.
- The [Cambridge Open Equity Initiative](#) and PLOS [PLOS Global Equity](#) models already listed above under goal #2 involve automatic removal of per-publication charges for authors in certain contexts/cases.

How will OASPA measure? Websites and pages describing policy and process. Screenshots of applicable use cases / author messaging in editorial systems and workflows. Self declaration from publishers.

----- DRAFT RECOMMENDED PRACTICES END -----

Acknowledgements - including several reviewers we wish to thank - follow below.

A next version will be published on the basis of community input and feedback. We invite you to [share your feedback with OASPA](#). Responses will be anonymous. A revised version will be shared with a DOI under an open CC BY license.

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OASPA is grateful to Pixabay for the use of these images:

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3. Goal #3 “transparency” image - [Gayathiri Gengatharan from Pixabay](#)
4. Goal #4 “waivers” image - [Sasin Tipchai from Pixabay](#)
5. Goal #5 “workflows” image - [Croatia industry image from Pixabay](#)

Over 35 reviewers commented on a previous version of this draft. We list them below with gratitude; OASPA is indebted to these reviewers for their help and thoughtful comments.

Reviewers’ participation, and them being listed here, does not convey approval, agreement or support for everything contained in this draft. Nonetheless, thanks are owed to each reviewer for their comments and suggestions. Meanwhile, OASPA takes responsibility for any misrepresentations or errors.

1. OASPA’s Equity in Open Access Working Group members:

Juan Pablo Alperin	Public Knowledge Project / PKP
Curtis Brundy	Iowa State University
Catriona MacCallum	Wiley
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Kellie O’Rourke	Cambridge University Press
Claire Redhead	OASPA
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2. Publishing organisations, including a selection of OASPA publishing members:

Lucy Barnes	Open Book Publishers
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Rod Cookson	The Royal Society Also an OASPA Board member
Scott Delman	Association of Computing Machinery (ACM)
Caroline Edwards	Open Library of Humanities / Birckbeck Uni Also an OASPA Board member
Matt Giampoala	American Geophysical Union (AGU)
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3. Selected other/external advisors:

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Participants in OASPA's 'Equity in OA' workshop series are also acknowledged here. These recommended practices aim to tackle several barriers to equity in OA discussed in our workshops that convened over 100 participants (publishers and librarians) from over 30 countries in 2023. (See workshop outputs here: [One](#), [Two](#), [Three](#), [Four - part I](#) and [Four - part II](#).)

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