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IDAHO

Recommendations for Scholarly Publishers and Journal Editors to Mitigate Barriers to Open Access Publishing for Researchers with Weak Institutional Ties

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Introduction & Scope

As Open Access (OA) becomes more common, meaning that anyone can read and reuse scholarly papers, more attention is being given to the issue of fair opportunities for researchers to publish OA. For researchers at well-resourced universities and research institutions, publishing OA is becoming increasingly easier due to read-and-publish agreements with major publishers, dedicated funds to cover article processing charges (APCs), and multi-layered support from library and scholarly communication specialists.

However, novel and rigorous research of publishable quality can nowadays be conducted outside traditional academic settings. For many researchers who are temporarily or by choice outside academia but still conduct research and wish to publish it OA, the costs and workflow burden of OA publishing can be prohibitive and exclusionary. Removing these barriers is key not only for individual careers but also for scientific progress as a whole.

Ensuring that diverse voices are represented in global research addresses systemic injustice, in which entire groups or perspectives risk being excluded from scholarly communication channels. By tackling the obstacles that prevent authors from participating in OA publishing, we can move closer to a system that is genuinely open, inclusive, and equitable.

The recommendations presented in this document aim to provide a basis for keeping the publication process as free as possible from barriers for authors in order to enable an inclusive and epistemically just scientific publication system. They were developed at the TIB – Leibniz Information Centre for Science and Technology in the course of the IDAHO project (IDentificAtion of Hurdles to Open Access Publishing for Researchers with Weak Institutional Ties: Epistemic Injustice in Scientific Publishing). The project focused on the obstacles faced by researchers with weak institutional ties in OA publishing. The recommendations were derived based on qualitative and quantitative studies with weakly-affiliated researchers and scientific journals editors.

Website: <https://projects.tib.eu/idaho/en/>

Recommendation 1. Remove or decrease financial burdens for authors

Financial constraints represent the primary barrier to open access publishing for authors with weak institutional ties. These include the lack of funding or grant support, as well as restrictive or intransparent waiver policies and eligibility criteria.

- Expand diamond open access models
 - Avoid business models for journals that are based on authors paying for publishing.
- Implement tiered or sliding-scale APC models.
 - If fees can not be avoided, journals should set different fee levels based on factors such as the author's institutional funding and the availability of research grants. Offer targeted support to authors from underrepresented regions, communities, or backgrounds to facilitate their participation in open access publishing.
- Provide a clear, explicit waiver policy on the website, outlining eligibility criteria.
 - Minimize time-consuming back-and-forth communication between authors and editors or publishers when evaluating eligibility for fee waivers.
- Grant APC waivers to independent researchers and scholars without restrictions based on their country of residence.
- Create transparent, automatic waiver and discount systems.

Recommendation 2. Accept and recognize diverse affiliation types

Scientific journals often fail to recognize independent researchers and scholars as a distinct category of researchers in their policies.

- Allow “independent researcher” as an option in submission systems.
 - Make sure customized affiliations can be typed in (e.g.independent researcher/independent scholar/consultant/writer etc.)

Recommendation 3. Enhance Multilingual Author Support Systems

Language barriers and limited familiarity with publishing workflow processes can prevent authors with weak institutional ties from successfully submitting their work.

- Develop submission platforms with multilingual interfaces
 - Allow authors to interact with submission systems in a language they are comfortable with.
- Offer language editing
 - Provide professional (affordable) editing support for non-native English speakers.
- Support Indigenous knowledge research dissemination.
 - Allow for non-traditional formats (e.g., oral histories, bilingual text, or community narratives) where appropriate.

Recommendation 4. Strengthen Trust, Quality, and Editorial Standards

Authors with weak institutional ties may face skepticism regarding the credibility of their work.

- Train editorial teams to avoid biases
 - Institutional and prestige bias, for example, can lead to favoring manuscripts from well-known universities or research institutes while excluding work from lesser-known institutions or independent researchers.
 - Language and geographic biases may result in a preference for native English writing.
 - There is also a prejudice that research in disciplines requiring extensive facilities or infrastructure (e.g., physics) cannot be of high quality if conducted by independent researchers without institutional support.
- Promote robust peer review
 - Adopt double-anonymous peer review to mitigate biases.
 - Consider publishing reviewers reports to increase transparency.
- Ensure OA journals are made visible and discoverable
 - Researchers outside academia may not be fully aware of recent developments in academic publishing, including innovative and more inclusive business models such as diamond OA.

Recommendation 5. Streamline and Simplify Submission Workflows

External, location-related barriers may hinder a researcher's ability to submit manuscripts to a journal. External and location-specific barriers can impede researchers from submitting their manuscripts to journals. These barriers may include low internet bandwidth or regional restrictions on submission platforms.

- Provide low-bandwidth submission options
 - Mobile-friendly portals allow access even where internet access is scarce or expensive.
- Offer offline submission kits
 - Allowing to prepare the submission offline saves bandwidth and costs
- Provide author friendly submissions
 - Allow emergency submissions via email

Glossary

Article Processing Charge — a one time fee paid to a publisher to make a scholarly article immediately and openly available to the public.

Diamond Open Access — a scholarly publishing model in which articles are immediately freely accessible to readers and are also published without charging authors any APCs. In this model, the costs of publishing are typically covered by subsidies from universities, libraries/library consortias or public funding, rather than by authors or readers.

Open Access — free and unrestricted online access to scholarly papers, allowing anyone to read, download, copy and reuse research outputs in a lawful manner, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. The only limitation is to ensure the integrity of the work and proper attribution to the author¹.

Weakly affiliated researchers/researchers with weak institutional ties — an umbrella term that encompasses a diverse group of individuals who are not affiliated with universities or research institutions, or who choose not to use an affiliation when publishing research articles. This group may include retired researchers, refugee researchers, citizen scientists, researchers conducting studies for civil societies or non-profit organizations, self-employed consultants, writers, as well as independent researchers or scholars who do not identify with the aforementioned categories.

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¹ Budapest Open Access Initiative Declaration. (2002). <https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/read/>