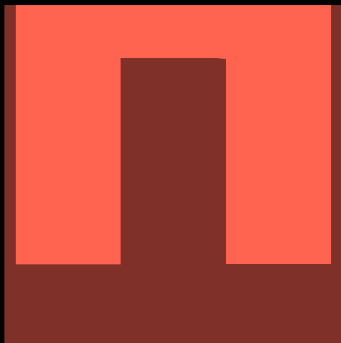
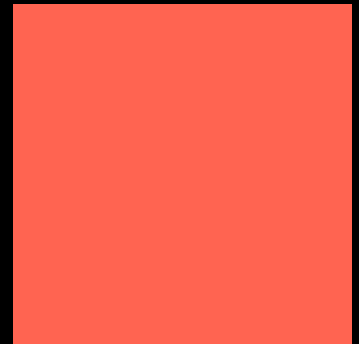
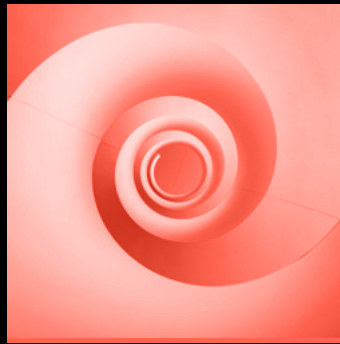
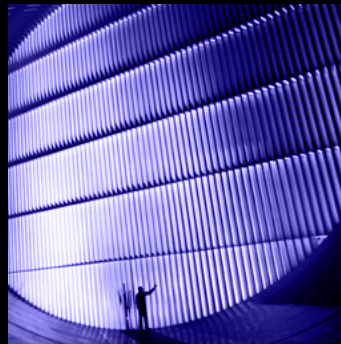
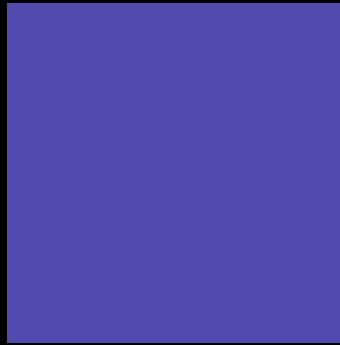
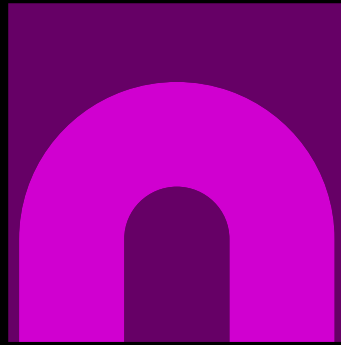
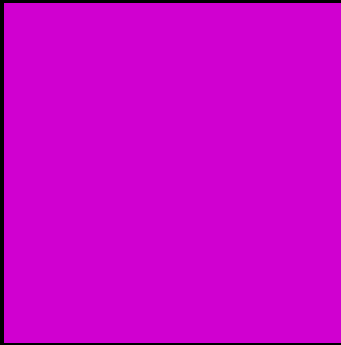
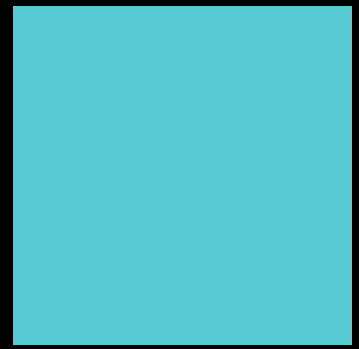
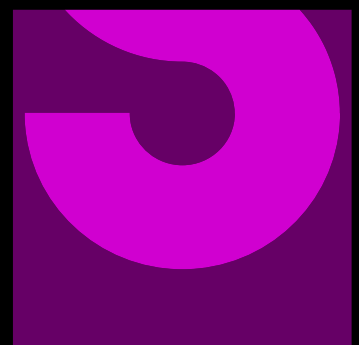
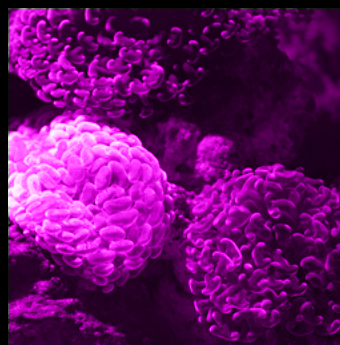
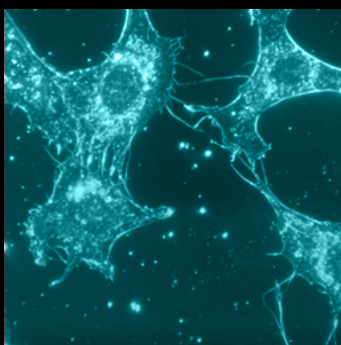
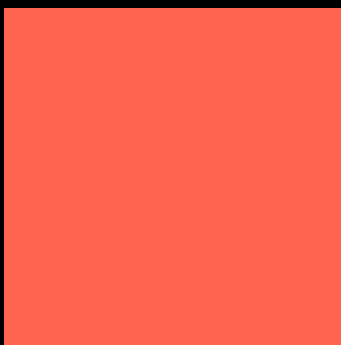


# OASPA

Open Access Scholarly  
Publishing Association



(In)equity in open access:  
OASPA's recommended  
practices on financial  
and workflow barriers

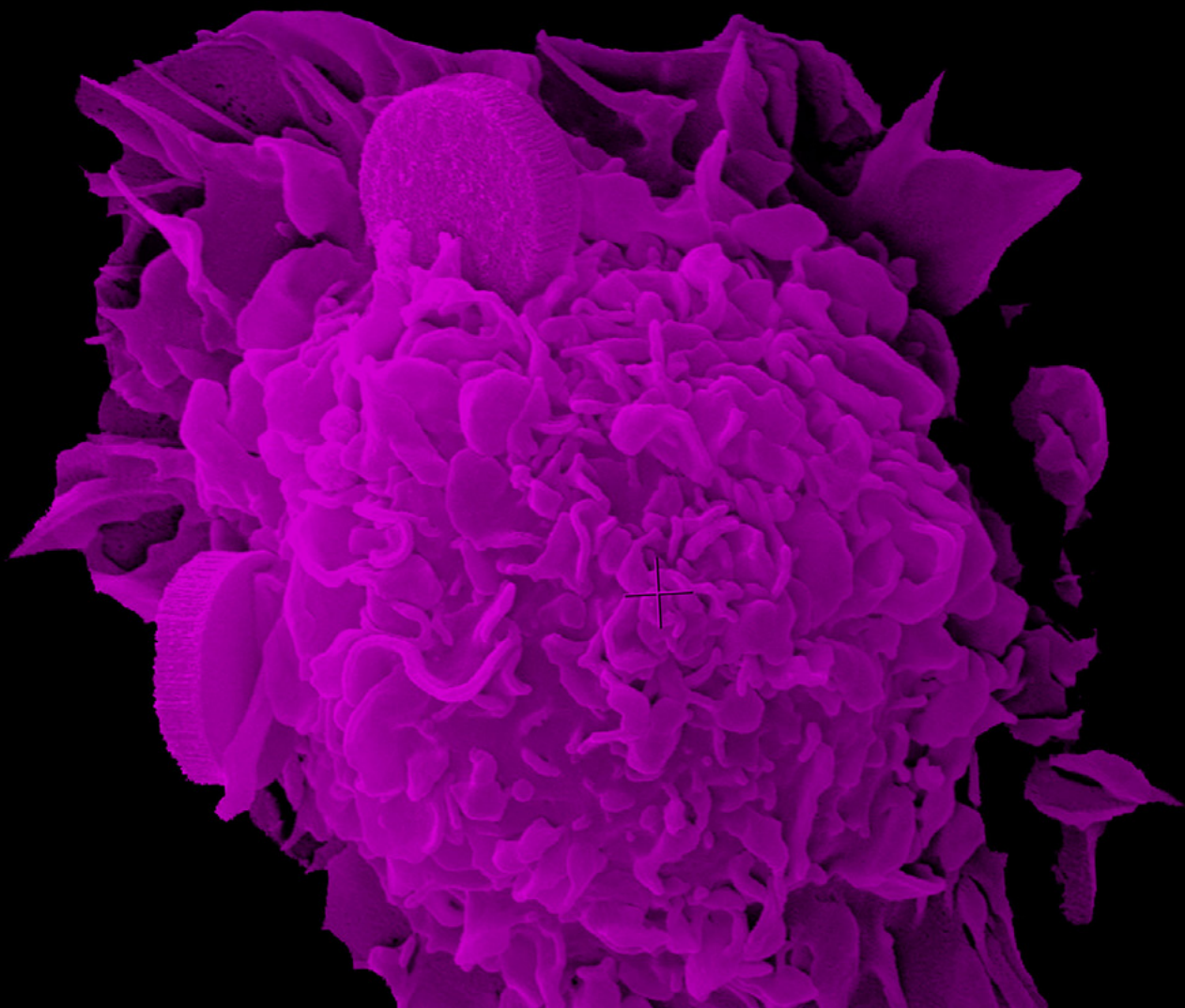


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# Introduction & Scope



A successful transition to open access (OA) is one where everyone can read and reuse scholarly work, and everyone can publish OA. OASPA's recommendations are made on this basis, and are driven by community inputs and consultation.

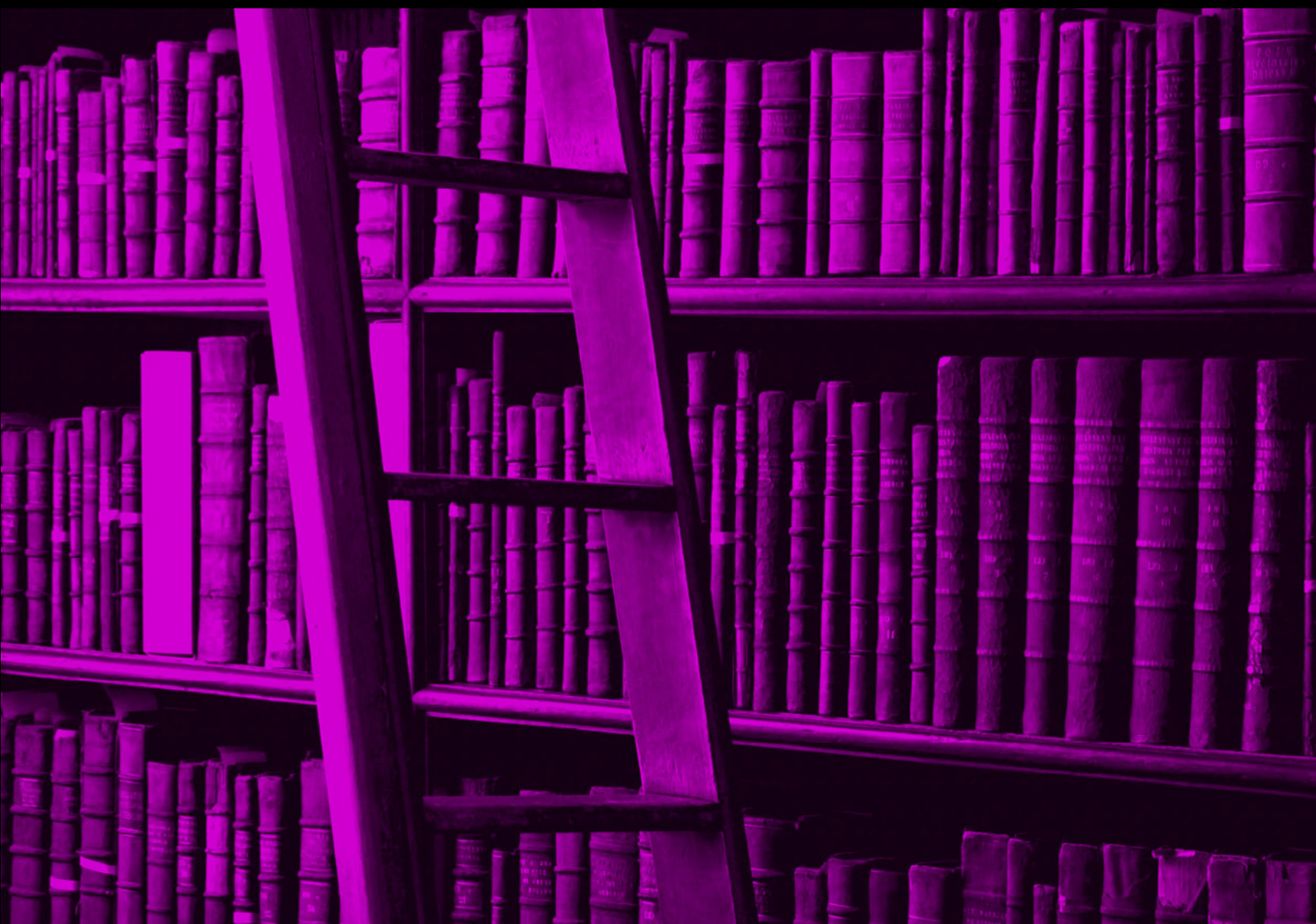
Equity is broad, multifaceted, and goes beyond equality to address all issues of cumulative advantage. Dissolving financial and workflow barriers in OA (covered here) is only one step in a much broader effort. This work focuses on reducing inequity by addressing OA models and financial and workflow barriers impeding OA publishing.

These are recommendations, offered as a practical toolkit to support OA, and the transition to OA, in ways that include the work of all scholars. This is because OA publishing is about disseminating the work of people - not nations, not institutions, not organisations, but individual researchers and author-groups. All scholars should be included, no matter where they are based, what field they are researching, or what their career stage is.

OASPA thanks reviewers, consultation feedback-providers, and everyone helping to shape our work. We remain open to input; this is an iterative process and we expect to add to and adapt our recommendations.



# Headline Goals



# To address financial and workflow barriers to open access, OASPA recommends:



## Enabling Open Access for All Scholars

Developing, supporting and preserving OA that is decoupled from author-facing fees to read or to publish will help enable OA for all scholars. Greater inclusion is achieved if the ability to publish OA is available to all researchers, without exception.

> For All Stakeholders



## Evolving Pricing, Purchasing, Funding, and Investment Practices

Where any type of fees are charged to any stakeholder, differentiated pricing from publishers can help cater for varying affordability and funding levels. Commitment of funds for more inclusive and reliable OA is needed to support reading and OA publishing for all scholars in all world regions.

> For All Stakeholders



## Describing Models and Pricing with Accuracy, Detail and Transparency

Knowing how OA publishing is sustained, and what underpins pricing, will help researchers as well as those who purchase / fund / invest in OA publishing to make informed choices. This will foster the trust needed to enable financial support for more inclusive OA models.

> For Publishing Organisations



## Reducing Barriers and Burdens in OA Workflows

Workflows should pre-emptively apply discounted, waived or charge-free OA whenever these scenarios are based on fixed rules - e.g., affiliation, geography, sales agreements. In addition to accurate information on websites, any waiver/discount information should be made clear to authors during submission. Policies could include voluntary contributions or free/discounted OA publishing for any scholar in need.

> For Publishing Organisations



## Seeking Connection

Routes to OA vary based on several factors and contexts. Connect directly with researchers and subject-matter experts about the barriers they face. OASPA also seeks feedback on the implementation of these recommended practices. OASPA has not covered all inequities in OA, and welcomes inputs to inform the next phases of this work.

> For All Stakeholders

Lack of common language is a barrier to shared understanding. Meanwhile, working examples offer tangible options as inspiration.

OASPA has therefore included some definitions and we list a series of many examples that prove we are well positioned to prioritise inclusion in how OA is achieved.

These practices are demanding, but they are suggestions to improve our exclusive system. There is huge variety in how OA publishing is done; not all suggestions will apply in all cases. Certain recommendations may be more challenging than others, while some may already represent standard operations.

Funding for OA often remains locked up in models that favour paywalls and/or those who are already advantaged. Mistrust between stakeholders often stands in the way of progress. Transparency and investment (from all stakeholders, not just publishers) can help deliver OA reading and OA publishing - for all scholars.



# Enabling Open Access for All Scholars

Developing, supporting and preserving OA that is decoupled from author-facing fees to read or to publish will help enable OA for all scholars. Greater inclusion is achieved if the ability to publish OA is available to all researchers, without exception.

## Headline Goals

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### Suggested:

- Where possible, normalise publishing where OA (paywall-free content, licensed for reuse) is the default status for all scholarly content, without a requirement for author-facing fees.
- Stakeholders (publishing organisations, universities, libraries, consortia, research organisations and research funders) are encouraged to coordinate efforts so that no authors face invoices.

### More Helpful If, in addition, you can:

- Ensure authors are not disadvantaged in availing of OA publishing as a result of their affiliation, or lack of affiliation; their type of funder or lack of funding; their disciplinary focus; or their geographic location. This needs multi-stakeholder collaboration that aims beyond individual, organisational and national benefit.
- No model, or pilot, can be successful without partnership. Co-development between publishing organisations and those who purchase / fund / invest in OA publishing is suggested when evolving approaches.
- Transparency in model development, and reporting to the community on lessons learned from trials, experiments and new or emerging programmes, is key.

### Better Still:

- Organisations already using or supporting models free from author fees and/or per-publication charges can prioritise the sustainability of programs on these terms.

### Further Reading

[Examples of practice as inspiration](#)

[Examples of intent and conversation relating to goal #1](#)

Jump to our definition of per-publication charges that includes author-facing fees.





# Evolving Pricing, Purchasing, Funding, and Investment Practices

Where any type of fees are charged to any stakeholder, pricing from publishers can help cater for varying affordability and funding levels. Commitment of funds for more inclusive and reliable OA is needed to support reading and OA publishing for all scholars in all world regions.

## Headline Goals

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### Suggested:

- Publishers can respond to customer and community needs, and evolve pricing strategies (where applicable) to support varying levels of affordability and funding availability across institutions, disciplines and world regions.
- Where fees are charged, price stratification should be simple to understand, transparent, and sensitive to stretched budgets in all regions.
- Funders, libraries, consortia and research organisations/institutions can support and invest in publishing programs that prioritise openness, inclusion and account for those with varying levels of affordability or differing abilities to pay. Common frameworks to assess publisher offerings ([see examples](#)) can help decisions about funding, investment or purchasing.
- Differentiated pricing does not need to only be country-specific. Published content from affiliated authors (e.g., corresponding and co-authors) and/or the type of institution (e.g., community / technical college vs PhD granting institution) should also be considered in pricing. Pricing by article type may be another factor.
- New strategies or trials should be openly reported on so the community knows what is being piloted, how, and what the outcomes and learnings are.

### Better Still:

- Mitigating financial burdens that result from effects of currency exchange-rate fluctuations will support those who purchase, fund, and invest in publishing services across world regions.

### Further Reading

[Examples of pricing practice as inspiration for publishing organisations](#)

[Examples of pricing and assessment tools as inspiration for publishing organisations and those who purchase / fund / invest in OA publishing.](#)



# Describing Models and Pricing with Accuracy, Detail and Transparency

Knowing how OA publishing is sustained and what underpins pricing will help those who purchase / fund / invest in OA publishing, and researchers, to make informed choices. This will foster the trust needed to enable financial support for more inclusive OA models.

Ethics note - the economic model for OA publishing should be distinct and separate from editorial criteria (selectivity, peer review, quality control and scope). Practices straddling editorial and financial areas should be avoided, or handled carefully in line with the principles of transparency and best practice in scholarly publishing and COPE's core practices.

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### Suggested:

- 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. Be clear about donors, grants, revenues or cost-subsidy sources to convey how OA publishing is enabled.
- Your route(s) to enable OA publishing should be publicly available on your websites, easy to find, and easy for anyone to understand.
- Actions needed from authors to enable OA (if any), should also be evident, including as part of the submission process. If no action from authors is needed to achieve OA, clarify this upfront.
- Labels (e.g., Gold OA, Diamond OA, R&P, S2O) can be confusing; practices carried out under such labels are not consistent across publishers. Models should also be explained in jargon-free sentences. (Suggestions in the examples).
- All types of fees/charges facing any stakeholder should be clear and up-to-date. Prices, currency, and means of making payments should be easy to find - whether charges apply to researchers or libraries.
- It is important to understand the sources of funding, grants or subsidies and resource-cost sharing (either as income or in covering operations) to provide a full picture of the costs of publishing.
- Where more than one type of income is involved, the complete mix of revenues or funding should be clear, with evidence that content and services are not being charged for twice.
- For hybrid titles the transition plan towards full OA, or, conversely, the intention to retain some paywalled publishing, should be evident on websites.



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### More Helpful If, in addition, you can:

- > Show/declare and be transparent about funding targets wherever possible.
- > Include, to the fullest extent possible, how and why prices, tiers, special rates and discount/waiver policy are set for all types of fee-charging titles. Clarify the basis, logic or principles underlying pricing / tiers / charges.
- > The existence and specifics of special deals and sales agreements, as well as grant/donor sources should be made transparent (for e.g., using ESAC for agreements).
- > Clarify the nature of any governance stake (or other benefits) that donors may receive, if relevant.

### Better Still:

- > If in addition, financials (losses/profits/surpluses) can be declared, with clarity about use of publishing incomes - e.g., shareholders, re-investment in the publishing operation, society-led educational activities, campus-based teaching programmes. I.e., be transparent about how revenues, or grants and subsidies, are used.

### Further Reading

Examples of practice as inspiration

Examples of jargon-free (and label-free) descriptions of the route to OA.



# Reducing Barriers and Burdens in OA Workflows

Publisher policy, editorial workflows, sales data and waiver programs can be harnessed to reduce barriers and burdens in OA publishing.

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Suggested: websites and submission systems should be clear and welcoming on waivers; and discretionary waiver policies should accompany other types of waivers. In more detail:

- Titles charging author fees of any type should make clear who is responsible for payment and how they can pay - 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 on websites carrying clear, up-to-date pricing and strong, welcoming waiver/discount information (including eligible / ineligible titles and program expiration terms).
  - Relevant information on publishing charges, waivers and discounts should be simple for anyone to understand and easily found at the journal/ title-level.
- Annual or regular checks of website(s), both on the publisher site(s) and external third-party sources such as [DOAJ](#), should be made to assure accuracy and consistency of listed pricing/policy with researcher experience.
- Accurate information about waivers/discounts should also be proactively made visible to authors during submission workflows, and included in author guidelines and instructions.
- Participation in any geography-based waivers/discounting/sales deals should be clear - e.g., use of World Bank data to determine waivers/ discounts for authors in certain countries OR [Research4Life](#)-based waivers OR agreements such as those with [EIFL](#) to enable charge-free OA and discounted APCs/BPCs in certain regions.
  - Country-level or within-country institution-based exclusions or opt-outs should be listed.



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- A discretionary waivers policy (i.e., considering and granting waivers/ discounts, case-by-case, to any unfunded author) should exist. This should be independent of and additional to other waiver policies (e.g., country of author, editor of journal).

This will reduce inequity by supporting OA irrespective of where in the world an author is located, and can support unfunded / underfunded authors who do not qualify for charge-free publishing under geographic or other waiver policy, or active sales-agreements.

- The discretionary waiver and discounting policy is best applied as a supplement to geographic and other waiver policies. This combination addresses issues of unequal distribution of resources between and within countries.
- Allocating annual budgets for discretionary waivers will support more equity in your publishing program.
- Where waiver-eligibility confirmation involving requests from author(s) is unavoidable:
  - Define what conditions or criteria apply (for being granted a waiver/discount), and what the process involves.
  - Include steps relating to evidence that may be required from authors.
  - Being mindful that waivers uphold a power relationship and intensify cumulative advantage, publisher policy and workflows should be constructed with sensitivity.
  - Avoid over-burdensome requirements such as 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.
- Authors also need to uphold integrity; OASPA acknowledges that scholars should not take undue advantage of waivers when they do have access to funding:
  - Accurate affiliation and persistent ID (e.g. ORCID) capture at submission is important.
  - Guidance from publishers on sources of available funds (e.g., from the library or research funder), can be helpful.



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More helpful: seeking support for OA or asking for waivers can be a deeply uncomfortable task, with both personal and administrative burdens for researchers. It is helpful if ability to publish OA is maximised, and workflows save authors from needing to plead their case. In more detail:

- Workflows should pre-emptively apply discounted, waived or charge-free OA whenever these scenarios are based on fixed rules such as affiliation, geography, or the existence of an active sales agreement.
- Proactive, upfront messaging within workflows can clarify charges/waivers/charge-free status for OA in a tailored and relevant way 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".*
- The success of surfacing relevant charges/waivers and messaging will also depend on accurate information from authors and/or data from other systems. Use of persistent identifiers for author affiliations, drop-down lists in submission workflows and system integrations can mitigate errors and provide a reliable basis for automations and proactive messaging. Where publishers do not own publication workflow systems, this also requires support from infrastructure/ editorial system providers.
- Where OA publishing is not covered by an active sales agreement nor any geographic /other rules-based policy, it can be constructive to seek voluntary contributions or use a 'pay what you can afford' approach for unfunded or underfunded authors - these can be used before resorting to discretionary-waiver application/vetting processes.
- Where libraries or institutions are involved in evaluating agreements or approving use of funds within publishing workflows (as part of these agreements), it will help if there are simple steps to administer and clear principles to evaluate sales/funding agreements. This will support a wider range of organisations to strike agreements that support OA.
- Road testing workflows on a regular or annual basis will help with updated language, and ensure that ongoing practice, user experience and messaging in your workflows is in line with the policy, pricing, discounting and waiver information described on your websites.
- To the fullest extent possible, apply your waivers programme to hybrid-OA publications to actively support a transition from hybrid OA to fully OA.

\*\*\*Cases include: author based in certain countries, editorship, society-membership, affiliation with an institution that has an active sales-agreement with the publisher, and any scenarios where the publisher can change or remove per-publication rates based on information provided (or requestable) at submission / during the publishing process.



Better still: In addition to the ‘suggested’ and ‘more helpful’ sections above, it’s better still to:

- Be transparent about the volume of waivers granted/rejected, and why. This will help quantify and demonstrate support for OA publishing for all scholars via waivers.
- Organise independent testing or user-based testing of your workflows by authors and libraries/ institutions.
- Multilingual information on submission guidance and any publishing charges could also be helpful.

#### Further Reading

[Examples of reducing barriers and burdens in workflows under goal #4](#)

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# Seeking Connection

Routes to OA vary based on disciplinary, regional, cultural, funding and other contexts.

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- > OASPA recommends connecting directly with researchers and subject-matter experts (from all regions and backgrounds) about challenges and barriers they face. Ongoing connection, compassion and honest exchanges will help.
- > OASPA recommends connecting with us about this work. We would like to continue convening conversations about doing OA in more inclusive ways, to support and hear from you and your experiences of implementing these practices. We welcome your feedback on challenges and lessons learned; and where/how you think OASPA can help. We value opinions from every kind of stakeholder of any size.
- > We have not covered all inequities in OA. We do not suggest that meeting these recommendations will do everything needed to address inequities in OA. We [invite your suggestions](#) to build out next phases of this effort, addressing other inequities.

## Further Reading

Read on for Definitions of [per-publication charges](#), [unfunded authors](#) and [waivers](#).



# Definitions

Lack of common language was a recurring theme [when discussing how to make APC/BPC models more equitable in 2023](#). OASPA sees both: the practical application of waivers in per-publication charge models of OA, but also, the problematic nature of waivers. We therefore define waivers below, distinguishing waiver policy from special rates, discounts or zero-charge pricing in cases that are separate to the matter of authors not having sufficient funds. With this, definitions are also provided for per-publication charges and unfunded authors/researchers.

## In This Section:

- > [Per-publication charges](#)
- > [Waivers](#)
- > [Unfunded authors](#)

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# Per-publication Charges

Per-publication charges in the context of OA are generally article publishing charges (APCs) and book processing charges (BPCs) payable to the publisher to enable OA.

These are commonly author-facing charges. However, per-publication charges can also be the basis of centrally-negotiated agreements between publishers and libraries/institutions, so that affiliated scholars do not face these fees.

Other fees can also be levied at the per-publication level (e.g. submission, colour, page fees and other charges).

All types of per-publication charges can present barriers to inclusion.

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# Waivers

## Further reading and perspectives on waivers:

- [Open access more harm than good in the developing world: correspondence, 2008](#)
- [Open access in low- and middle-income countries: a 2016 INASP survey of researcher attitudes and experiences](#)
- [Fee waivers for open access journals - a 2015 study](#)
- [Analysis of publication trends in the DOAJ 1987 - 2020: a 2023 report](#)
- OASPA's background work: [2022 'OA market' post](#) and [report from the 2023 'Equity in OA' workshop #3](#).

OASPA is using this definition for whenever we use the term waiver/s:

- In models where per-publication charges - commonly faced by authors to support OA publication of articles or books, waivers involve either a complete removal of, or a reduction in, the applicable
- charge. A partial-waiver or discount involves some level of reduction on the applicable APC or BPC. A full waiver is when the publishing charges are totally removed.
- Waivers enable OA publication without (or with reduced) publishing fees for authors who do not have access to funding (or those who have insufficient funding), to pay the applicable charge. Factors that make an author eligible for a waiver are not uniform across publishers, and scholars having to prove eligibility (or prove neediness) to attain waivers, is problematic.
- Waivers are intended as an inclusionary practice. However, 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 also create and maintain a power relationship; they maintain and reinforce systemic privilege in academic publishing.

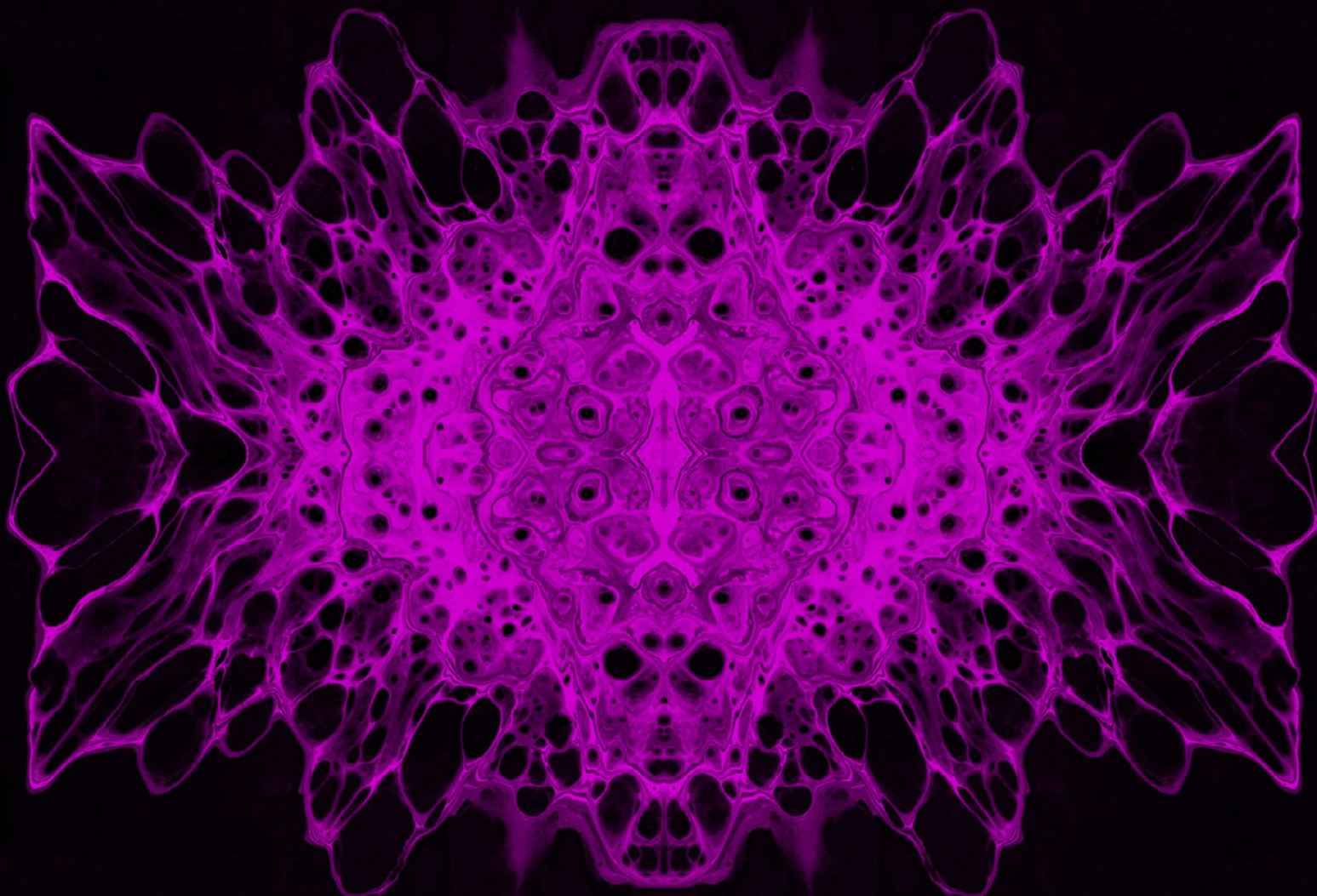
# Unfunded (author or researcher)

OASPA is using this definition for whenever this term is used:

- > In the context of any publishing model where fees are charged to authors, unfunded authors are cases where funding 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.
- > As a non-exhaustive list, unfunded authors could be: unaffiliated or independent researchers, retired academics, PhD students, early-career scholars (especially those between posts), and researchers whose research-funders/ employers do not have the means to cover publishing charges. In the context of sales deals such as OA agreements or Read & Publish/Transformative agreements (TAs), unfunded authors are also those who meet the above criteria and are not affiliated with an institution that has signed an agreement with the publisher. Scholars at an institution where a capped TA has 'run out' could also fall into this category.
- > An author / author group's unfunded status is not dictated solely by affiliations or geographic locations.

# Examples

Please visit [our online resource](#) for examples and applications of these recommended practices.





The Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association -  
a diverse network of organisations engaged in open  
scholarship. [Contact us.](#)