NISO Proposed Work Item

Work Item Title: Recommended Practice for Operationalizing Open Access Business Processes

Proposal for Consideration by the NISO Voting Membership
Approval Ballot Period: May 25 – June 26, 2023

The following proposed work item is submitted by: Jack Maness, University of Denver; Moon Kim, University of British Columbia; Jessica Thibodeau and Jamie Carmichael, Copyright Clearance Center; Yvonne Campfens, OA Switchboard; Ádám Dér and Adriana Sikora; Max Planck Digital Library.

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Background and Problem Statement:

We're in a transition from a journal subscription world to an Open Access (OA) article-level economy. Infrastructure, standards, and practices that have taken shape over decades are not instantaneously fit for this new world. Best practices are needed in order to facilitate and catalyze a variety of feasible OA business models.

Limitations on openly sharing research have been challenging, but the increasing adoption of OA policies and mandates has shifted strategy and business practices in libraries, scholarly publishing entities, and associated organizations. However, the operationalization—whether on article level, at deal level or indirect (e.g., diamond OA)—of financial transactions, compliance tracking with various policies, and related workflows has yet to be normalized. What's left in the absence of established best practices in the current landscape is a sundry assortment of individualized solutions in libraries and publishers that rely heavily on publishers' workflows, systems, dashboards, invoices, and data. Organizations are still trying to understand the eligibility criteria for article publishing, as well as grappling with the different approaches to address micropayments for single articles funded by libraries to automated batching of payments for transformative agreements. Essentially, as the financial models between libraries and journal publishers shifts from the pay-to-read to a free-to-read paradigm (whether financed via the pay-to-publish/Article Processing Charge ('APC') model, or non-APC models (such as diamond, Subscribe to Open, etc.), what was once a relatively standard workflow and (meta)data exchange is increasingly non-standard. Significant impacts for each stakeholder in the process abound:

1) Authors are uncertain whether they qualify for coverage under a deal, or discounts or waivers of APCs;
2) Large publishers, whose organizations may include different divisions that manage finances separately from publishing workflows, may not readily know which author on an article was invoiced for a micropayment, or what a single university's spend on OA charges may have been in a given time period;
3) Though clear, shared workflows across publishers and libraries exist for verifying author/manuscript eligibility within agreements, there remains too much variation in the way data are exchanged and reported; libraries utilize a mixture of institutional records and/or a heavy dependence on publishers for this information;
4) Libraries cannot adequately assess the true financial impact of packaged transformative deals due to the lack of standardized reporting on publication metadata and of transparency in the pricing, except through consulting the list price amount and quantifying the number of open access articles published; the true cost and value of individual articles are not ascertainable;

5) Consortia who manage invoicing or transformative agreement negotiations may encounter these problems at scale, ranging from small libraries and publishers to large ones;
6) Funding agencies, indeed, all stakeholders, are hard-pressed to ensure compliance with various OA policies and agreement requirements/arrangements.

OA financial management has many moving parts and impacts many different systems: publishing/editorial systems, library systems, and institutional business/financial systems. Because these systems were developed for subscription-based workflows, much of the work ranges from manual, with different tracking systems in spreadsheets, PDF invoices, and workflows extraneous to core systems, to an overreliance on publishers' dashboards.

Further, while inequities in legacy subscription models (readers without access to libraries with reasonable budgets had limited access to controlled articles) are countered by the growth of OA, new inequities are introduced: small- to medium-sized research institutions may find it difficult to support OA charges, thereby limiting the options of researchers; OA publishers may lose opportunities to publish high-impact articles because their authors have no funding or guarantee of funding for APCs, so do not attempt to publish in Gold OA titles.

There are a number of organizations (e.g., ALPSP, ESAC, OA Switchboard, SPARC, CCC) devising local workflows to facilitate the work (and for their memberships) but a shared standard or recommendation to operationalize data-driven business processes would be of benefit to the open access community.

Statement of Work:
The work item proposal is to develop a NISO Recommended Practice on operationalizing OA business processes. The project will form a working group with representation from diverse OA stakeholder groups listed under "Partners and Participation," and the working group will conduct a landscape analysis on current OA business processes and create a recommended practice on operationalizing it taking into consideration the following:
- Identify current gaps in the infrastructure, which includes exploring how publication and financial metadata flows through the various systems or not
- Define standardized protocols for exchange of data about activities: what data libraries may need to process transactions; what data publishers might need (to integrate systems or exchange information with partners about transactions); reporting to various partners in the ecosystem
- Define terminology that describes these transactions, to support consistency in business transactions
- Incorporate analytics, evaluation and assessment tools and metrics;
- Acknowledge how gold OA perpetuates inequity by benefiting established authors over emerging, larger and better-funded institutions over the inverse, and how the marketization of knowledge creation has incentivized revenue streams.

The work will be conducted in two (sequential) tracks, linked to characteristics/timing in the business processes:
(1) metadata exchange pre-publication and to support article-level financial transactions (if applicable)
(2) reporting post-publication

Partners and Participation:
The OA ecosystem impacts the following stakeholder groups, from those building to consuming the infrastructure and workflows:
- Content creators
- Funding agents (research funders)

- OA publishers (including library publishers), service providers, aggregators, and other content providers
- Subscription agents and book jobbers
- ILS providers
- Acquisitions, electronic resources, and OA information professionals (e.g., ESAC)
- Institutional stakeholders from small to large institutions
- OA community initiatives (e.g. OA Switchboard)
- Financial standards groups (e.g., EDItEUR)
- Collections stats entities (e.g., COUNTER)
- OA advocacy groups (e.g., SPARC)
- Legal departments

Timeline:
- Month 1: Appointment of working group
- Month 2: Approval and publication of charge and initial work plan (including final determination of scope)
- Months 3-9: Completion of information gathering (phase 1)
- Months 10-13: Completion of initial draft recommended practices document (phase 2)
- Months 14-16: Public comment period
- Month 18: Responses to comments and publication of final NISO Recommended Practice

Funding:
N/A