

## **A Cooperative Open Access Publishing Model that Begins with a Subscription-Equivalent Transition**

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The academic community has demonstrated a growing interest in an open access scholarly publishing alternative to both journal subscriptions and article processing charges (APCs). The Public Knowledge Project is introducing and soliciting feedback on a cooperative publishing model involving libraries and journals. The cooperative concept is a natural extension of the collaborative spirit behind libraries hosting open access journals, libraries joining together to underwrite open access for particle physics through SCOAP3, and libraries sponsoring Open Library of the Humanities, Knowledge Unlatched and other open access initiatives, as well as open source initiatives, such as LOCKSS, DSpace, and Open Journal Systems.

The SET co-op scenario presented below is based on three assumptions: Publishers and editors are more likely to consider a flip to open access if their subscription revenue can be replaced. Libraries have an interest in sustaining and opening the journals to which they subscribe. The formation of a cooperative requires an initial commitment of trust and financial stability, affording its members a period in which to work out the allocation of resources for sustaining open access.

These assumptions have led us to propose a three-year “subscription-equivalent transition” (SET) to initiate the open access publishing cooperative. With the SET, the libraries subscribing to a set of journals agree to pay a subscription-equivalent fee for three years to the participating journals that have agreed to become open access. During that time, journals and libraries will assemble the data and work out the principles and finances needed to raise the quality of scholarly publishing through the collaboration of the key stakeholders. Intrigued? Read on. Weigh in.

### The SET Co-op Scenario

1. Whether starting with journals, publishers, societies, or subscribing libraries, the formation of the co-op begins with a reaching out to these key players, seeking expressions of interest and basic publishing data to enable the development of a preliminary co-op financial model and the terms of participation, which will then circulate among the concerned parties.
2. The choice facing the invited libraries and journals is basically between either continuing the current pattern of subscription renewal or, for the same price as this renewal, forming an open access publishing co-op for a three-year subscription-equivalent transition (SET) period. The co-op agreement will include terms for reverting, following the SET, to the subscription model, if members do not feel that a

sustainable economic and improved scholarly publishing model has been worked out in that period.

3. Existing open access journals may also be invited to join in this agreement. Their SET will involve continuing their current open access model of support (grants, libraries, institutions, APCs, etc.). During this period, the journals will also participate in formulating the co-op's economic model by, for example, seeking direct research agency funding to replace author APCs.
4. In forming the cooperative, the libraries and journals establish the terms of governance, management, finances, and membership. Publishers will maintain their identities and journal ownership. Members will share publishing, usage, and management data, while exploring ways of integrating and upgrading in-kind library support (including web-hosting, software support, promotion, and recruitment) and utilizing third-party services.
5. The data collected during the SET period will be used to develop, test, and refine the post-SET open access publishing model. It will be based on continuing library allocations, credited in-kind contributions, and institutional support. It will pursue technical innovations through grants to improve open source tools and develop standards, although no one system (such as PKP's OJS) need be used by all members. The co-op will employ usage metrics to identify and recruit additional libraries and journals, to work on improving member journals, or to discontinue titles.
6. The co-op's expenses will include, but are not limited to, publishing costs, systems support, technical innovations, and contracting third-party publishing services. It will incubate new journals and build a reserve as publishers always have. Some costs may be reduced through in-kind contributions and shared resources; others will be reallocated, as co-op management, for example, will absorb what was once spent on journal and library subscription management; and still others may temporarily go up to bring about significant gains in some aspect of publishing.
7. The goal is to arrive, prior to the end of the third year, at a model that is not only cost-effective, sustainable, and scalable, but is capable of improving the quality of scholarly publishing through the cooperation of the membership. The SET period concludes with the co-op members deciding either to proceed, which would include working in association with other publishing co-ops, or to dissolve the co-op and revert to the subscription model.

In terms of our current strategies, we're testing the viability of this cooperative approach with a number of groups, among them (a) the Canadian social sciences and humanities journals, with a [the case study](#) based on recent economic data from them and a potential pilot under discussion with the libraries, Erudit, and the journals; (b) [Libraria](#) an anthropology journal collective, with a case study in preparation and an expression of interest about to go out to the

subscribing libraries (following the SCOAP3 model); (c) the biomedical field, with [preliminary work](#) done on eLife and PLOS to explore whether direct grant-agency funding with a little library support could prove a more cost-effective open access alternative to APCs and subscriptions in the sciences; (d) the journals and libraries of Ghana, a number of which at a recent conference expressed an interest in a national mode and for which we are assembling data; (e) with a few further leads at the exploratory stage, and of course, more welcomed.