OCUL Open Access Evaluation Criteria

OCUL-IR Open Access Working Group

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Overview

The Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL) and its members frequently license open access (OA) content and routinely support OA initiatives to expand access to information.

This document guides the evaluation of consortial OA offers for licensing content and supporting open initiatives. Below, we outline principles we aim to adhere to in these negotiations, as well as the criteria we would use to evaluate adherence.

The OCUL Open Access Evaluation Criteria is presented in three parts:

- **General principles**

  Principles that can be applied to licensing OA content and supporting OA initiatives.

- **Additional principles specific to licensing OA content**

  Criteria specific to licensing content with OA components.

- **Matrix of Principles and Criteria**

  A matrix with the guiding principles, specific criteria, and notes to aid in assessing offers (Appendix A).

We recognize that the landscape of OA publishing is rapidly evolving. As part of our commitment to maintaining relevant and practical criteria, we will regularly review and update this document to ensure that our evaluations remain aligned with emerging trends, best practices, and the evolving needs of our members and the broader academic community.

These criteria were adapted from those published by the University of Guelph Library, to whom we are appreciative. This work is openly licensed via CC BY 4.0.

General Principles

Governance and Sustainability

We support organizations and business models that aim to transition scholarly communication from commercial models of for-profit publishing (e.g., "closed access") to open access, which can reduce barriers for readers and authors.

We support economically sustainable scholarly infrastructure and business models that can positively impact the scholarly communication ecosystem.

We will engage with and support publishers as they experiment with and transition to open access business models.

Criteria

- Organizational entity status (i.e., for-profit vs. not-for-profit)
- Governing bodies
- Business model

Refer to Appendix A for more information about these three criteria.

Indigenization, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (IEDI)

We support organizations that espouse the principles of IEDI through their values, operations, and outputs.

We support organizations that mobilize open scholarship from equity-deserving scholars worldwide, including those from the Global South.

We support organizations that mobilize decolonization and reconciliation goals.

Criteria

- Diversity statement
- Geography
- Indigenous knowledge
- Accessibility

Refer to Appendix A for more information about these four criteria.

Technical Considerations

We support organizations and initiatives that use open scholarly infrastructure, including persistent identifiers, standards and protocols, and open source software.

We support organizations that effectively integrate with or complement the library's existing technical infrastructure to ensure the sustainable upkeep of our systems.

Criteria

- Data standards
- Metadata and identifiers
- Interoperability

Refer to Appendix A for more information about these three criteria.

Pricing and Licensing

We support investments in platforms and products that offer transparent and equitable pricing models; where costs may increase, they are evidence-informed and predictable and justifiable.

We support investments that are affordable and economically sustainable within the library's broader acquisitions budget.

We support organizations that are committed to open licensing (e.g., Creative Commons).

Criteria

- Spending
- Funding availability and sustainability
- Open licensing

Refer to Appendix A for more information about these three criteria.

Transparency

We support organizations committed to transparency in their financial practices and business activities.

We support organizations that provide clear, regular reports on how they spend investors' or funders' money, including detailed breakdowns of income and expenses, staffing, leadership compensation, operational costs, capital expenditures, research and development, and lobbying.

We support organizations that publicly disclose their funding sources, ensuring that these sources are ethical actors.

We support organizations that report usage and author uptake metrics for materials published during the license period in a timely, regular, accurate, and easily interpreted manner.

We support organizations collaborating with the scholarly community to standardize reporting systems for open access publishing activity.

Criteria

- Financial reporting and public disclosures
- Usage and publication data
- Participation in transaction systems

Refer to Appendix A for more information about these three criteria.

Principles Specific to Licensing OA Content

Open Access Publishing Models

We will support engagement with publishers as OA publication models evolve.

We prioritize agreements with publishers that do not require authors to pay Article Processing Charges (APCs) as a publication requirement (Diamond OA).

We support negotiations with publishers that advocate for institutionally affiliated authors to retain author rights over their published materials, including their right to self-archive or auto-deposit a version of their work in a repository (Green OA).

We support negotiations with publishers for subscription cost deductions or rebates based on their reported APC revenue from their Gold and Hybrid OA products.

Criteria

- Open Access publishing model

Refer to Appendix A for more information about this criterion.

Long-Term Preservation

We support publishers who take measures to safeguard the scholarly record through the long-term preservation of open access publications.

Criteria

- Trusted Digital Repositories
- Technology

Refer to Appendix A for more information about these two criteria.

Pricing

We support agreements that are transparent about their pricing structure and provide clear value for money.

We support agreements that break down costs, including subscription and publishing fees and other associated costs.

We support agreements that demonstrate a clear and transparent return on investment through measurable metrics, ensuring that both read and publish rights are utilized effectively.

We support sustainable business models that adapt to varying publishing outputs and offer pricing predictability over time.

We support agreements that provide reasonable discounts on APCs, especially for consortial purchases, and ensure that pricing is aligned with the number of participating institutions.

Criteria

- Cost transparency
- Value for money
- Pricing predictability

Refer to Appendix A for more information about these three criteria.

Building Capacity

We support publishers that invest in building capacity and knowledge related to OA through training, education, and support for researchers, librarians and administrators in navigating the OA landscape.

We support publishers that build capacity by supporting institutions in the development of open educational resources and in maintaining infrastructure for open data sharing.

Criteria

- Support
- Open education and scholarship

Refer to Appendix A for more information about these two criteria.

Appendix A: Matrix of Principles and Criteria

General Principles

Principle: Governance and Sustainability

Criteria	Notes
Organizational entity status	For-profit vs. not-for-profit • In the US, look for mention of a 501(c)(3) filing on the About page. • In Canada, look for mention of non-profit status on the About page. • In Ontario: Search for the organization's name on the Ontario Business Registry and look for mention of non-profit status.
Governing bodies	Composition of the Board of Directors • Is there adequate representation of a variety of stakeholders represented within the organization? • Is there mention of an advisory board or steering committee? • Is this group composed of scholars, librarians, or other research community members?

Business model	Is the business model viable and sustainable?
	• For non-profit organizations providing OA infrastructure:
	    o Is there a dedicated commitment to OA and staying non-profit (no acquisitions)?
	    o Is there an association with a research institute or university?
	    o Is there a connection to libraries?
	
	Does the mission statement, About page, or annual report indicate past funding success and future funding sources?
	
	Is there evidence from the broader OA field indicating this organization's credibility or reputation? If yes, is there available evidence of a successful track record?

Principle: Indigenization, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (IEDI)

Criteria	Notes
Diversity statement	Does the organization provide access to an actionable IEDI or diversity statement on their website?
Geography	Is the organization situated in the Global South? Was the content or infrastructure produced by scholars or workers in the Global South? Does the organization offer OA fee discounts or waivers for Global South authors?
Indigenous knowledge	Where Indigenous knowledge is being handled, is the resource or investment guided by the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance or the First Nations Information Governance Centre's principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP)?
Accessibility	Does all OA content and supporting platforms adhere to WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) 2.1 or higher? Does the organization incorporate accessible design principles in publishing platforms and materials? Does the organization provide content in multiple formats (e.g., HTML, PDF, audio, Braille)? Does the organization ensure alternative text for images, captions for videos, and transcripts for audio materials?

Principle: Technical Considerations

Criteria	Notes
Data standards	Where applicable, does this organization adhere to standards such as the FAIR Guiding Principles?
Metadata and identifiers	Where applicable, is there evidence this organization can be incorporated into Linked Open Data initiatives? (e.g., metadata standards or persistent identifiers)
Interoperability	Does this organization need to integrate with existing technical infrastructure? If so, does it? (This includes open infrastructures but also proprietary tools such as Omni, Alma, LibGuides, or Ares) Where applicable, what staff time and expertise are required to set up and maintain this investment?

Principle: Pricing and Licensing

Criteria	Notes
Spending	Are details available about what revenues will be used for (e.g., staffing, a developer roadmap, advocacy, public awareness campaigns, etc.)?
Funding availability and sustainability	Is the price reasonable and affordable for OCUL schools? Do we have available funds to meet the costs of this investment? Is the offer financially sustainable for OCUL members?
Open licensing	Do authors have the option to select a Creative Commons license or another type of open license? This might include mention of CC-BY or CC-BY-NC-ND. For more information on CC licensing, see How open is it? What pathways to OA are available to authors?

Principle: Transparency

Criteria	Notes
Financial reporting and public disclosures	Does the organization provide clear, regular reports on the following? • Annual reports and financial statements of publicly traded companies (required in Canada and the US) • Annual reports and financial statements of not-for-profit organizations (required in Canada and the US) Are the organization's funding sources from (e.g., government, corporate, NGO, institutional, individuals) ethical actors?
Usage and publication data	Does the organization provide usage data about published materials using the COUNTER Code of Practice? For agreements that include a publishing component (e.g. Read and Publish), does the organization provide bibliographic details about every work published and the associated APC savings? This should include: • All works accepted under the agreement and those for which authors opted out of OA. • Author information. Does the vendor use standardized Persistent Identifiers (PIDs) such as ROR for institutional affiliation; ORCID for author identification and disambiguation? • Accurate bibliographic metadata about the works published under the agreement. • The amount of APC or other charges avoided (whether waived or discounted) for each published work. This is a key financial performance indicator. Does the publisher share historical publishing data at the start of negotiations? This should detail past publishing practices of institutionally affiliated authors, including toll-access and open access works, and itemize past APC expenditures.

Criteria	Notes
Participation in transaction systems	Does the publisher use OA Switchboard or CCC Rightslink to report OA publishing activity? The consistency provided by these services simplifies data management for libraries. Does the licensing library have ready access if a bespoke tracking system is used? Does the publisher collaborate with the scholarly community to improve and standardize OA reporting practices?

Principles Specific to Licensing OA Content

Principle: Open Access Publishing Model

Criteria	Notes
Open Access Publishing Model	Identify the publishing model being used in the agreement. Common types include: • Read and Publish • Publish and Read • Subscribe to Open • APC-waiver tokens Are there APCs, and are they reasonable for those who don't participate in an agreement? Does the publisher offer Diamond OA options? Does the publisher allow authors to retain copyright to their work? Does the publisher have a clear, favourable policy for authors to self-archive a version of their work, including auto-deposit? (e.g., Green OA) Are the embargo periods for self-archiving (if any) reasonable? Is there an opt-in or opt-out mechanism for authors? Opt-out should be the default mechanism; authors who opt out should be permitted to convert papers to OA without retroactive penalty.

Principle: Long-Term Preservation

Criteria	Notes
Trusted Digital Repository	Does this publisher adhere to preservation standards such as [LOCKSS](), or does it allow local loading into [Scholars Portal's Trusted Digital Repository]()?
Technology	Does the publisher enable the harvest and archiving of content on another platform through open APIs and protocols?

Principle: Pricing

Criteria	Notes
Cost transparency	Does the publisher provide a detailed breakdown of subscription fees, publishing fees, and other associated costs? Does the publisher clearly explain how fees are allocated across services (e.g., staffing, operational costs)?
Value for money	Are there publication caps under the agreement? The preference is for unlimited OA publishing. If we're transitioning from an existing agreement, is the agreement cost-neutral? Are there demonstrated cost savings through a consortial agreement? • Is the pricing being offered better than pricing for individual members? • Is the pricing aligned with the number of institutions participating in the agreement? Would there be a return on investment based on usage and publishing data?

Criteria	Notes
Pricing predictability	Is there a clear outline of future price increases, including percentage-increase caps? Are safeguards included in the agreement to prevent steep fee hikes or unexpected costs?

Principle: Building Capacity

Criteria	Notes
Support	Does the publisher provide comprehensive training and workshops on OA options, journal selection, manuscript preparation, and submission processes? Does the publisher develop online tutorials, guides, or personalized support sessions for researchers to address their OA-related questions and concerns? Does the publisher invest in continuing education and professional development opportunities for librarians, offering webinars and workshops at library conferences to stay up to date on the latest OA trends, policies, and advocacy strategies?
Open education and scholarship	Does the publisher support the development of open educational content? Does the publisher support open scholarship practices such as open data?