

Open Publishing Agreements

Nineteen research universities negotiating as one, with a single position: our authors publish open in the journals they already publish in — **at no cost to them, with no annual limit, and with no additional workflow.**

WHO THIS IS

Maurice York and Jeff Spies, Big Ten Academic Alliance. Six agreements signed, five years of data, and the instruments we used to get them — free to use, re-use, and adapt.

65.6% → 91.7%

Articles published open in journals covered by an OPA, 2021 to 2025

68 to 112%

Range of increases in use of BTAA research with one major publisher across ten lower- and lower-middle-income countries

17,000

Articles published open under BTAA OPAs, 2021 to 2025

Figures from analysis of OpenAlex data. If you have just heard the ten-minute version, this is the rest of it.

THE POSITION

Three core terms

Each one replaces a standard clause of the “transformative agreement” and “read-and-publish” agreements that came before — clauses that were creating unnecessary friction in the author experience and ultimately working counter to our values.

These are the whole of it. Every other clause we argue for is downstream of these three, and each one displaces a standard clause of the agreements that came before.

No fees

The corresponding author is never asked for money. Not an APC, not a discounted APC, not a departmental transfer, not a grant line. The cost conversation does not reach the author at all.

IN PLACE OF

~~Author or funder pays the APC; institution reimburses on application.~~

No caps

Uncapped means uncapped: every eligible article accepted during the term publishes open, however many there are. No token pool, no per-institution allocation, no first-come basis.

IN PLACE OF

~~A prepaid pool of N articles per year, exhausted by Q3, after which authors pay list price.~~

No hassle

Identifying an institutional affiliation at acceptance is the entire workflow. No vouchers, no eligibility form, no library approval step, no waiting on a decision before the article can proceed.

IN PLACE OF

~~Author requests a voucher; library verifies eligibility; publisher confirms; article waits.~~

The message to faculty: *in all of the publications under a publisher’s umbrella, no fees, no caps, no limits, no hassle; authors keep rights in their own work under a Creative Commons license; immediately open and available to anyone.* Libraries pay no more than they do now — we are converting our spend from read to publish, not adding to it.

THE APPROACH

Strategy, hypothesis, method

From the vantage of 2021: only 19% of Big Ten articles were open at the time of publication. Transformative Agreements were moving the needle, gradually, alongside repositories and preprints — but they worked on the back end, on contract and payment terms, and left the author’s experience of publishing untouched. Publishing terms had become too complicated for authors, resources and opportunities were unevenly distributed, and costs had become unsustainable for authors and institutions alike.

Strategy

WHERE IT STARTS

Increase relevance to mission. Mission manifests in values — so convert our spend to align with our values and highest priorities: increasingly open and fair scholarship.

Hypothesis

WHAT WE BET ON

Operationalize values by anchoring them in the author experience, and align incentives to make the path to open easy.

Method

HOW IT HAPPENS

Everything comes down to contracts in the end. Change the contracts.

THE DISTINCTION

An Open Publishing Agreement is not a Transformative Agreement

There is a lineage here: subscription models, then Transformative Agreements (or ‘TAs’), now Open Publishing Agreements. Transformative Agreements did real work. They moved money from subscription toward publication, and they combined two revenue streams that had been flowing to the publisher under separate business terms — one from libraries as subscription fees, one from authors as Article Processing Charges, or APCs. They proved that a consortium could shift a publisher’s business terms. They are also where several of the problems we are now trying to fix came from.

An OPA is the step past TAs, and it differs in two ways that go together: it is **values-centered**, beginning from our own principles rather than from a publisher’s proposal, and it is **author-focused**, designed around what the author experiences rather than how the money moves on the back end.

Every standard clause of a Transformative Agreement sorts authors by something other than the quality of their work. A cap makes open publishing first-come, first-served. A fee, even a discounted one, makes it a question of who holds funds. A voucher workflow makes it a question of who knows the process. Early-career researchers, unfunded disciplines and smaller campuses lose most.

What is a Transformative Agreement?

A subscription contract with a publishing component attached. The library keeps paying for access, and a defined quantity of open publishing is bundled in, usually priced as article processing charges under another name. “Transformative” describes the intent — converting subscription spend into open publishing over a fixed term — not the author’s experience of it.

And a read-and-publish agreement?

The most common form of one, and the name says what it does: a read side and a publish side, negotiated together. The publish side is typically bounded — a pool of articles, an allocation per campus, a discount off the list APC — and when the boundary is reached, authors are back to paying.

So what makes an Open Publishing Agreement different?

It is values-centered. A Transformative Agreement begins from the publisher's proposal — a price, a package, a quantity — and negotiating means adjusting those. We begin from our own values and principles, named and weighted before any offer exists. We share them with the publisher when negotiations open and ask them for a proposal that matches our values, rather than holding values up against a proposal after the fact. That is a different entry point, and it produces a different process: we are not working through someone else's offer, we are asking how closely each offer aligns with a standard we set in advance. The question that got us here — we are reasonably good at measuring cost and business process, so how do we measure our values? — is the one the Dial exists to answer.

And what does author-focused mean in practice?

That the terms are judged by what the author experiences, not by how the money moves between library and publisher. Everything the other model leaves in place changes here. No fee reaches the author, there is no quantity to exhaust, and there is no workflow to complete — identifying an affiliation at acceptance is the whole of it. Our spend converts from reading to publishing, and the business relationship stays between publisher and consortium. It never reaches the author at all.

Why insist on the distinction?

Because the standard clauses of a Transformative Agreement reintroduce the inequities the agreement was meant to remove. A cap makes open publishing first-come, first-served. A fee, even a discounted one, makes it a question of who holds funds. A voucher workflow makes it a question of who knows the process. Each one sorts authors by something other than the quality of their work — and early-career researchers, unfunded disciplines and smaller campuses lose most.

Is an OPA simply a Transformative Agreement with better terms?

No. A Transformative Agreement with better terms is still built on a quantity of articles and a price per article; better terms raise the quantity or lower the price. An OPA takes both out of the design. Better terms are what you get from negotiating harder; an OPA is what you get from negotiating from somewhere else.

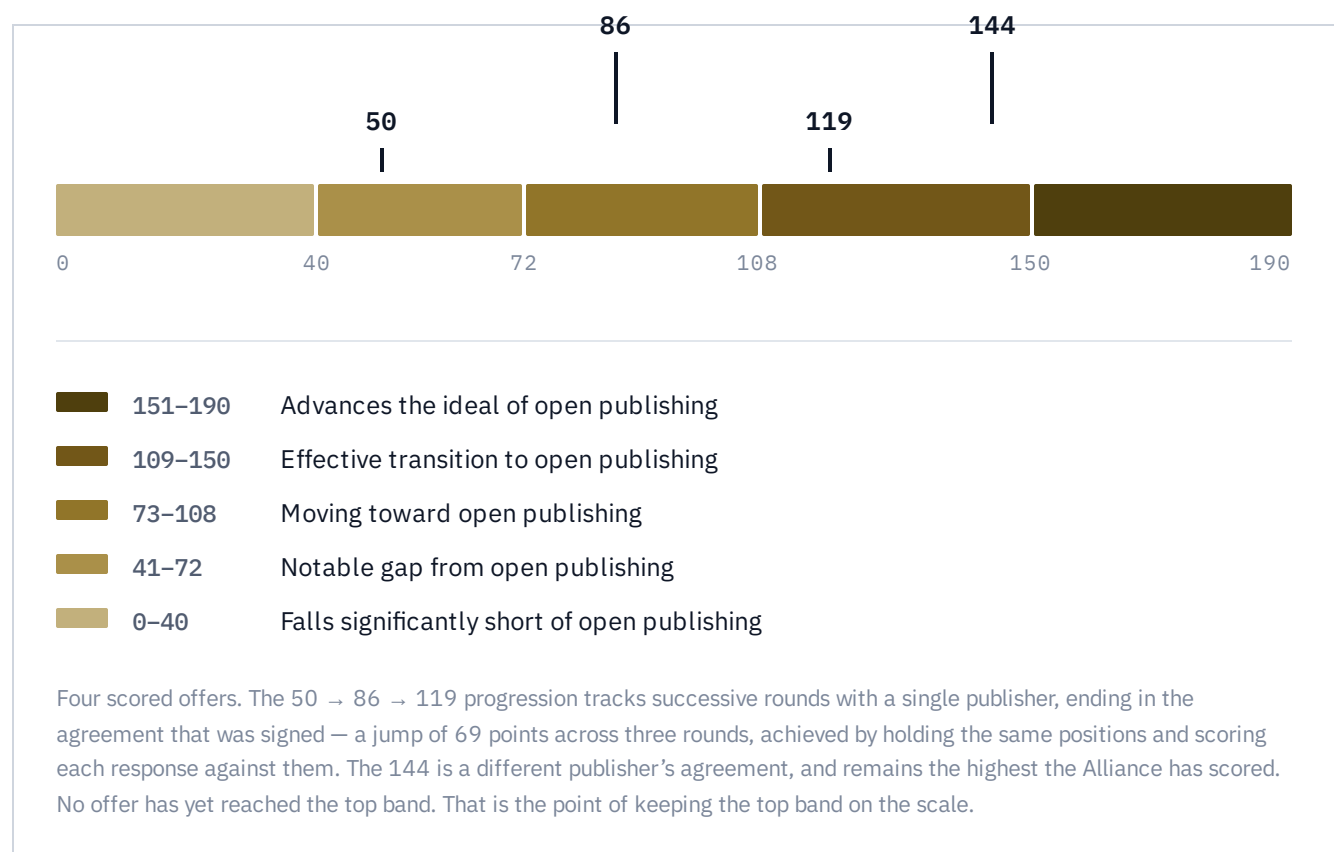
Both earlier forms (subscriptions and TAs) were necessary. They lifted us to where we stand today. We are able to take the next step **because** of them, not in spite of them. None of this is a disavowal of them — the terms set out on this page were won in negotiations that started from that ground. Our argument is that these previous forms were a stage, rather than a destination. We discuss what that values-centered entry point looks like in practice on the rest of this page.

WHAT WE BUILT

The Open Publishing Dial

We stopped negotiating against proposals. We begin from our own values and principles, named and weighted before any offer exists, and we hand them to the publisher when negotiations open — then ask for a proposal that matches them. The Dial is how we score what comes back.

Six values, expanded into 38 contract-able elements, each scored one to five, for 190 points possible. A zero means the offer is silent on the point — itself a finding worth recording. Score successive offers from the same publisher and you can see whether the terms are moving toward your values or away from them.



The six sit under three freedoms — **to disseminate, to publish, of scholarship** — and the number of scored elements under each is where our priorities turn into arithmetic.

WHERE THE 190 POINTS SIT			
FREEDOM	VALUE	ELEMENTS	POINTS
Freedom to disseminate 70 POINTS	Removes barriers for authors and institutions	11	55
	Increases OA publications within our membership	3	15
Freedom to publish 60 POINTS	Establishes a fair cost model	7	35
	Increases publishing opportunities	5	25
Freedom of scholarship 60 POINTS	Simplifies the publishing relationship	4	20
	Gives authors greater control of use and reuse	8	40
Total	Six values	38	190

The weighting is the argument. Each value carries a different number of scored elements, and that count is where our priorities turn into arithmetic — removing barriers for authors is worth 55 points, simplifying the publishing relationship 20.

WHAT HAPPENED

Five years of performance

Drawn from OpenAlex. The bottom row is the one to take into a negotiation: in the journals an agreement covers, better than nine articles in ten now publish open.

INDICATOR	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Open Publishing Agreements in force	1	2	4	5	6
Articles published open under an OPA	360	2,517	4,070	4,863	5,176
Share published open, in OPA journals	65.6%	58.9%	87.4%	91.7%	91.7%

Not one of those articles carried a fee to the author, and libraries did not pay any more than they would have otherwise. That is the sentence that makes the rest of it repeatable.

Fair access to resources and opportunities

EVERY LEVEL OF RESEARCHER

- 28,000 unique authors
- 12,700 open articles with a single publisher

Multiplied scholarly impact

CITATION EFFECTS

- Open articles receive 3× more citations than closed articles
- BTAA-authored articles show 35–45% higher citation growth

Unimpeded flow into the global commons

2020 TO 2024

- A 68% to 112% increase in article usage across the ten lower-income and lower-middle-income countries where this research is most read

THE WIDER PORTFOLIO

An open publishing continuum

Over recent years, the conversation about open access for the benefit of public knowledge has fractured into a number of models (variously described in shorthand with names such as green, gold, bronze and diamond. Whether this rubric is meant to be colors or precious materials is a matter of some debate). Our hypothesis is that the path forward for open access is an investment in all of the pathways together, rather than a bet on one.

On this continuum, commercial scholarly publishing sits at one end, academy-owned publishing at the other, with ecosystem-level models and partners standing between them at the balance point. Agreements with the large commercial publishers move the majority of article output, but only in combination with ecosystem-level partnerships and academy-owned publishing do they help to build the future that truly open knowledge will depend upon.

DOAJ COLLECTIVE ACTION	arXiv INFRASTRUCTURE	DOAB & OAPEN INFRASTRUCTURE
Open Library of Humanities DIAMOND	MIT Press DIRECT TO OPEN	University of Michigan Press FUND TO MISSION
JSTOR PATH TO OPEN · MONOGRAPHS	Lyrasis OACIP COMMUNITY INVESTMENT	OA Switchboard INFRASTRUCTURE
Big Ten Open Books ACADEMY-OWNED MONOGRAPHS		

Big Ten Open Books is a collective action of the Big Ten libraries and Big Ten university presses: the first collection of 100 open access books published in August 2023, a second completed in summer 2025, three more planned. 150,000 downloads to date, averaging 79 per book per month.

IF YOU TAKE ONE THING

What we would carry forward

Set the position before the offer exists

THE ENTRY POINT

Terms named and weighted in advance are what make a negotiation about something other than price. You are no longer adjusting someone else's proposal; you are asking how closely it meets a standard that was already there.

Values-centered and author-focused

THE PROCESS

Two commitments, and they only work together. Values-centered means successive rounds of offers are assessed directly by how the offer terms and contract terms improve toward matching our stated values. Author-focused means the terms are judged by what the author experiences, not by how the money moves between library and publisher. Ask what the author has to do differently: if the answer is anything at all, the terms aren't there yet.

Score offers on a shared scale

WORTH TESTING TOGETHER

A rubric used across a negotiation — and across a community — is how a consortium can tell whether it is making progress or just making agreements. Ours is free to copy and change.

The next fifty percent

STILL OPEN

More than half the world's research is now published open. What remains is where funding is thinnest, where gold OA is commercializing fastest, and where author license choice is drifting toward terms that give rights back to the publisher.

AN HONEST WORD

Success, and the headwinds against it

The model works, but the ground is still moving underneath all of it, and a consortium taking this route should take that into account and consider it carefully.

- + National and global instability, and significant shifts in the research funding landscape
- + Commercialization of open access, especially in pure gold OA business models
If some avenues in commercial publishing close down, we need to open others that do align
- + Author license choice drifting toward CC BY-NC-ND
Often with exclusive rights granted back to the publisher — the opposite of what the agreement was for
- + More than half the world's research is now published open. The next fifty percent is the hard part

Our values do not change, even as the business models (out of necessity) do. It is the business models that adapt to the values, as we continually navigate toward the ideal. Our watchphrase: anchor in the author experience, and keep closing the gap between values and practice.

TAKE THESE

Tools for your own negotiation

Publisher positions do not move for one buyer. They move when the same positions arrive from many directions at once — which is why all of this is free to use, re-use, and adapt.

The Open Publishing Dial

The full scoring matrix as a blank template: six values, 38 scored elements, 190 points, with category subtotals and an overall score that calculate as you fill it in. Copy it and change the elements and weights to match your own priorities.

Downloadable version available on our web page:
<https://bit.ly/OPAs>

Talks and presentations

Slides from Berlin conference sessions, the OA2020 Munich workshop, and the Moving OA Forward focus session on building an open access investment portfolio.

Downloadable presentations available on our web page: <https://bit.ly/OPAs>

GET IN TOUCH

Questions about the model, or negotiating one yourself?

We are glad to walk through the model above in greater depth — what was asked for, what was conceded — and answer questions you may have as you tailor this approach to your own context. That conversation is more useful than any summary.

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More on the agreements at btaa.org/library/open-scholarship/agreements