Guiding Principles
for Partners, Presses & Community Members

OPENING
THE FUTURE

What is OtF, why was it created, and what does it aim to achieve?

Opening the Future's ultimate aim is to reshape how knowledge dissemination is funded and accessed, by leveraging the collective financial contributions of academic libraries worldwide. Subscribing members of the program fund scholarly presses to publish new OA monographs, while the member libraries simultaneously benefit from access to a curated selection of closed content at a special price, and no single institution bears a disproportionate burden. The presses use the membership revenue solely to produce new OA monographs, moving towards an affordable, sustainable model for academic publishing and creating a collection of OA books that are open for the world.

Part of OtF's aim is to help shift the current industry-wide acquisitions process from acquiring local collections with repeated one-time spends, to supporting/enabling an open global collection through ongoing spend. The model was devised to enable small-to-medium-sized legacy/traditional presses that wish to move in good faith towards OA publishing: the model leverages their backlist books that for all intents and purposes cannot be flipped themselves. Flipping a closed backlist is tricky due to the complications, uncertainty, and prohibitive costs associated with gaining retrospective permissions, and logistical difficulties like digitisation and conversion to accessible formats. Instead, OtF uses the closed backlist as a lever to allow small/medium presses to systematically and incrementally move away from paywalled publishing in a low risk manner[1]. It also enables them to move away from one-off, author-facing fees like Book Processing Charges being their sole option for publishing OA books. Ultimately, OtF gives a press a mechanism by which they can move towards Diamond OA[2]. It is designed to encourage and sustain bibliodiversity and to allow small/medium-sized presses to operate at the scale, pace and level of risk that suits them.

Guiding Principles

Financial

1. Transparency in both the flow of OtF money, and in the governance of the program. This means being transparent on the number of members signed up and how much money is being raised, how that money arrives at the press and where partners are compensated for their services along the way. Mission-aligned partners are crucial to the OtF workflow and the fees they receive cover only the costs of the work they perform, ensuring the program can operate efficiently while ensuring it also remains cost-effective for libraries.
2. Transparency when an incremental target is reached for the next book in the pipeline and release advance details, and the book itself, in a timely manner.
3. Transparency about which libraries are financially investing.
4. Transparency about production costs[3] for the OA books (and therefore transparency on the threshold needed to unlock each book in the pipeline), and also transparency on what titles will be published using OtF funds.

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[1] When we launched OtF in 2020, we accepted that it might ultimately be a 'transitional one' in the sector, at a time of experimentation in OA book funding models. For some presses it may not be needed in the long term - OtF may be a springboard for them towards other fully OA funding models.

[2] (if we accept, for now, the definition of Diamond OA as no author fee + no reader paywalls, though for many, community governance and other criteria are critical aspects of Diamond).

[3] What is and what isn't counted as a production cost is a topic of ongoing discussion in the sector - it's not within the scope of this document to define. As long as a press is open and consistent about what their costs are, this should suffice.

5. OtF funds will remain within the publishing ecosystem. It will be used purely to support the publishing activities of the press, and will not be used for capital extraction. Additionally, should the legal status of a participating OtF publisher change in a way that may impact this, for example through purchase by another company, or by being floated on the stock market, the press has a responsibility to share this information with supporting libraries and any third party service providers who are facilitating their OtF subscriptions, so that they can evaluate if ongoing support is desirable.

6. Have a written public plan for if subscription revenue exceeds the costs spent on publishing OA frontlist in any given year. This transparent plan would detail, in advance, what you'll do with that surplus if the situation arises. For example: a commitment to publish more books OA; reducing fees for members; or re-investing the surplus money into open infrastructures.

7. Be accountable and transparent on the scale of OA ambitions for the frontlist: whether a press sets a target of 2, 10 or 30 books flipped a year, this should be clearly stated on the documentation and website, and reporting should demonstrate progress against these.

8. Similarly, have a transparent policy on if/how ad hoc grants/funds might be being used to top up frontlist books already partially-funded by OtF. This ensures clarity on where members' money is being spent. For example, reporting could highlight which books were funded from which source.

9. The model is incremental by design and this is one of its USPs, with a low flipping threshold that makes it quick for members to see positive results of their investment. An OtF program should not be changed into an 'all or nothing' approach with a higher threshold to flip an entire series for example (i.e. it's not Subscribe to Open [S2O] and it's not Direct to Open [D2O]).

Community

1. The model was devised and initiated by the Copim project which was underpinned by community-governed principles and a spirit of co-operation and non-competitiveness. Any organisation running an OtF program should have a demonstrable collaborative approach and community feedback mechanisms - e.g. through a Library Advisory Board or an Advisory Board containing a mix of appropriate experts (for example: librarians, academics, other publishers, publishing sector experts etc). This can be an existing advisory board.

2. Transparency about any legal relationships/obligations to other organisations that could directly impact any of the following: (a) publishing activities, (b) finances, (c) how OtF revenue would be used, (d) a press' ability to independently enter into contractual obligations with authors. If these relationships exist, how are they managed to ensure they do not unduly impact the independence of the press?

Technical

1. All new titles will be open access (OA)[4] but each new book will be published only when enough members join and enough combined fees are accrued to cover the publishing cost - a bit like a crowdfunder target.

2. Publishers should have their Creative Commons licence policy clearly articulated and easy to find on their website for libraries and authors.

3. If a planned forthcoming book is in scope for OtF funding but is initially listed as paywalled until the funding threshold is met, when funding is achieved metadata must be changed promptly before any sales are made. This ensures that an already published paywalled book cannot be

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[4] A book is open access when access to the e-book is not restricted by licence or payment barriers to the reader, is available free of charge and re-usable in the long term, and published with an open licence (e.g. Creative Commons CC BY, CC BY-SA, or similar) immediately upon publication and without embargo. Metadata for the book should be openly-licensed wherever possible.

retrospectively made OA. The press and distributors must move the book to an OA status, in direct-to-consumer channels as well as library channels, well before the book is published (2-3 months in advance has worked sufficiently so far). This also ensures there is no embargo period post-publication (and hence compliance with many funder mandates): the aim is for immediate OA.

4. OtF-funded OA titles must be made easily accessible on multiple platforms, including OAPEN and listing in DOAB as a minimum, and will have high-quality metadata (preferably openly-licensed) for further dissemination.

5. The packaged (non-OA) backlist books will be provided in accessible PDF format as a minimum, though other formats are also welcome (and indeed may be legally required). Library members/patrons will have unlimited access to those non-OA books, DRM-free for the duration of membership, and perpetual access subsequently. Terms of use of the backlist to be clearly outlined in a licence or through a SERU agreement (see also the Best Practices and Mission-Aligned Practices section below for more details on this).

6. Libraries will retain secure access to the backlist package books for as long as they are members: membership will last a minimum of three years, with the option to renew after that. If they choose to cancel before the end of three years, access to the titles is revoked.

7. Perpetual access is part of the model. At the expiry of the three years, libraries will own the package in perpetuity but will have the option to renew membership and subscribe to another package of different books if available, or renew by switching to pure frontlist OA support (if available).

8. No catches and no hidden fees, no bait and switch - let the books speak for themselves. The backlist package contents won't change from the titles advertised after the member has signed up. Members won't be asked to pay more on top of their agreed annual fee for the titles advertised (though they can, of course, choose to invest in more packages where available, if they wish to).

9. Bundling of packages could be a strength of the model and attractive to libraries/consortia, but it cannot be compulsory for a press.

10. Libraries have the option to subscribe to more than one package if they wish, or to a double or triple members version of the package.

11. The platform will provide MARC and KBART files for the titles, also COUNTER-compliant usage statistics, and will share package metadata with major library discovery services.

Best Practices and Mission-Aligned Practices

These are aspirational or operational standards that go beyond the core financial, community, and technical principles.

1. It is recommended that presses and member libraries agree to use the NISO Shared E-Resource Understanding (SERU) to govern terms of use of the backlist, which is a lightweight and fast agreement for all parties. Under SERU, use of the backlist books is governed by Copyright Law. There is no commitment to use SERU every time if a Library or Publisher prefers a licence.

2. Assuming there are enough eligible authors, a percentage of the revenue should be earmarked for researchers from less wealthy institutions (for example, institutions eligible for the Research4Life program), and for non-institutional researchers, i.e. independent and unaffiliated scholars who may not have an institution backing them. (An example of this concept can be found in this blog post interview).

3. OtF is ideally suited to helping unlock scholarship in regions and contexts where typically scholars may encounter prohibitive financial barriers to reading and publishing. By intentionally

selecting book series for OtF packages (and their associated frontlist) in those regions, contexts, or areas of study, the model can lower or even demolish those barriers. In this way OtF can play a real role in promoting equity of access, equity of opportunity, and inclusion of scholars and scholarship.

4. Where possible, presses with an OtF program should endeavour to engage with supporter member institutions and authors, advocating for OA publishing and explaining to prospective authors how their publishing process works. This could range from simple information on the website through to in-depth OA advocacy, training, support, and OA community involvement.

5. Accessibility and Inclusion – ensure all content is accessible to readers with disabilities, support equitable access for under-resourced or independent researchers, and remove financial or technical barriers wherever possible.

6. Ethical Publishing Practices – maintain transparency and fairness in author contracts, peer review, and research integrity. Clearly communicate policies on conflicts of interest and publishing ethics.

7. Openness Beyond OA – providing openly-licensed metadata for all titles (both open and paywalled) is desirable, ensuring interoperability across platforms to maximize discoverability and reuse.

8. Continuous Improvement and Innovation – engage in regular evaluation of publishing practices, integrating community feedback, and responsibly experimenting with new models or technologies that advance equity, sustainability, and access.

9. Preservation and Longevity – ensure long-term accessibility and preservation of content through sustainable digital archiving, adherence to best practices for metadata, and participation in recognized preservation initiatives.