##### cOAlition S

#### Price and Service Transparency Framework: building a service to provide access

#### to publisher services and pricing data

# Request for Information (RFI)

* Issued: 19th October 2020
* Responses: by 30th November 2020

#### Introduction

Plan S is an initiative for Open Access publishing that was launched in September 2018. The initiative is supported by cOAlition S, an international consortium of research funders and organisations. Plan S requires that, from 2021, scientific publications that result from research funded by public grants must be published in compliant Open Access journals or platforms.

Further information on cOAlition S can be found at <https://www.coalition-s.org>. Prospective suppliers are encouraged to visit the website to gain insight into this coalition of research funders. The cOAlition S Office is hosted by the European Science Foundation (ESF).

Before commissioning the development of a service to provide access to data about publisher services and pricing, the European Science Foundation wishes to solicit the views of potential suppliers and other informed parties regarding the feasibility of this procurement and the likely approach that suppliers would take to satisfy the brief.

#### The service brief

On behalf of cOAlition S, the European Science Foundation is exploring the feasibility of procuring an online, web-based service that provides:

1. a secure means by which academic journal publishers, who publish research articles funded by cOAlition S organisations, can upload price and service data, as specified in either of the cOAlition S- approved price transparency frameworks;
2. a secure means by which *approved users* (typically researchers, funders, institutions, librarians and library consortia) can access these data and download or compare the prices and services provided by different journals and publishers.

Given that some of the data that will be made available through this service is considered sensitive, it is imperative that suppliers can demonstrate that data uploaded by a publisher, and intended by them for approved users only, could not be accessed by any other publisher. In the remainder of this text, the term “approved user” will refer to all users that are not publishers (e.g. researchers, funders, institutions, librarians, and library consortia).

Although the data which is collected will not be made openly available (unless specified by the publisher providing that data), any code developed through this work and documentation required for others to reuse it must be made available under a liberal open source license ([MIT licence](https://opensource.org/licenses/MIT) or equivalent).

#### Background

The original [Guidance on the Implementation of Plan S](https://www.coalition-s.org/addendum-to-the-coalition-s-guidance-on-the-implementation-of-plan-s/principles-and-implementation/) specified that:

*“Where Plan S requirements apply, no later than 1st January 2020, cOAlition S, in partnership with publisher representatives and other stakeholders, will define the various services (e.g. triaging, peer review, editorial work, copy editing) publishers will be asked to price. This price transparency requirement will apply to all articles funded through transformative arrangements as well as those levied by Open Access journals and platforms”.*

To address this ambition cOAlition S commissioned Information Power to develop a price transparency framework in 2019. A pilot study in early 2020 included participants from [Annual Reviews](https://www.annualreviews.org/), [Brill](https://brill.com/), [The Company of Biologists](https://www.biologists.com/), [EMBO Press](https://www.embopress.org/), [European Respiratory Society](https://www.ersnet.org/), [F1000 Research](https://f1000research.com/), [Hindawi](https://www.hindawi.com/), [IOP Publishing](https://ioppublishing.org/), [PLOS](https://plos.org/), and [Springer Nature](https://www.springernature.com/gp). This pilot validated that the information sought could be provided *and* would be useful to the research community – especially researchers, funders librarians, and library consortia. The cOAlition S leadership has endorsed this [framework](https://www.informationpower.co.uk/launch-of-the-plan-s-price-transparency-framework/). It consists of a [data collection spreadsheet](https://www.informationpower.co.uk/the-plan-s-price-transparency-framework-data-collection-spreadsheet/), an [implementation guide](https://www.informationpower.co.uk/the-plan-s-price-transparency-framework-implementation-guide/), and [recommendations](https://www.informationpower.co.uk/the-plan-s-price-transparency-framework-recommendations/).

Independent of this work, the Fair Open Access Alliance (FOAA) developed a [Publication Services and Fees](https://www.fairopenaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/0.4-press-release-nov-2019-Fair-Open-Access-breakdown1.pdf) framework which, to date, has been implemented by [Frontiers](https://www.frontiersin.org/about/fee-policy), [MIT Press](https://www.mitpressjournals.org/journals/qss/openaccess), [Copernicus](https://publications.copernicus.org/apc_information.html) and [MDPI](https://www.mdpi.com/apc).

Both frameworks – the one developed by Information Power and the one developed by Fair Open Access Alliance – have been endorsed by cOAlition S. Publishers can use either framework when providing price and service data to cOAlition S.

cOAlition S believes that the information we seek from publishers will help approved users better understand if the fees they pay are commensurate with the open publication services delivered, and to better understand the elements of those services, for example, peer review, editorial work, and publishing infrastructure. Institutions will be able to use these data to inform discussions with researchers, for example, to offer advice to them about their publishing options.

Providing this information is also an opportunity for publishers to demonstrate their commitment to open business models and business cultures, to build awareness of their services and value, to build trust with approved users, and to be more responsive to their needs.

#### Requirements for publishers to provide this data

cOAlition S has determined that from **1st July 2022**, only those publishers which adhere to at least one of the approved Frameworks will be eligible to receive funds from cOAlition S members. This covers funder contributions to *any* model of financing open access publications including, but not limited to:

* APCs
* Transformative Agreements
* Transformative Journals
* Non-APC journals or platforms

To support publishers who wish to provide price and service data in line with one of the frameworks, cOAlition S has publicly committed that, no later than the 1st December 2021, it will provide details on where publishers should deposit data in line with either of the frameworks and indicate what conditions will be imposed on accessing the data.

A number of publishers are already sharing price and service data as part of broader communication campaigns, ahead of any formal requirement. To give potential suppliers an insight into how the data is presented, see the examples in Table 1.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Information Power Framework | FOAA Framework |
| Example 1 | [Development](https://dev.biologists.org/content/transparent-metrics) (Company of Biologists) | [MDPI](https://www.mdpi.com/apc) |
| Example 2 | [F1000 Research](https://blog.f1000.com/2020/08/19/price-transparency-on-f1000research/) | [Frontiers](https://www.frontiersin.org/about/fee-policy) |

*Table 1: Live examples of publishers using the cOAlition S-approved price and service transparency frameworks*

#### A sense of scale

As made clear in section 4, *any* publisher wishing to receive payment for publishing services delivered to researchers funded by a cOAlition S organisation will need to provide price and service data in line with the approved frameworks.

Although this means the service we wish to procure must be able to scale to accommodate potentially thousands of publishers, analysis of where cOAlition S funded researchers publish, shows that around 200 publishers publish over 95% of cOAlition S-attributed research.

#### Competition issues

We anticipate that the provision of transparent price and services information will help approved users better understand the services they are procuring from publishers, and thus introduce more competition in the scholarly publishing market.

We are mindful that this joint effort towards more transparency rests on the buy-in of all parties involved. We are, therefore, attentive to the specific regulatory requirements with which publishers need to comply.

To reassure publishers, who may have concerns regarding legal implications of sharing price and service information, any system to collect and share the price and transparency framework data must be developed in a way that fulfils competition law requirements. The details will need to be determined by the appointed supplier, working in partnership with cOAlition S and potentially some publishers. Still, one likely solution would be through the establishment of a registration and authentication system, which would allow approved users to access these data but would not allow publishers to access their competitors’ data.

#### Key requirements

Although the list below does not constitute the full statement of requirements, it does highlight the key requirements this service will need to provide.

1. A registration system such that publishers and approved users could register to use the “Price and Transparency Framework” system. Registered users include both publishers and approved users.
2. Login/authentication system such that registered users could access the “Price and Transparency Framework” system.
3. Provision of a publisher portal, where publishers could automatically or manually upload their data in line with one of the approved frameworks for price and service transparency.
4. A process by which publisher-submitted data can be time-stamped and checked for completeness and adherence to the requirements.
5. A process by which incomplete or incorrect submitted data can be returned to the publisher.
6. An archive function such that year 1 data was NOT overwritten by year 2 data, etc.; all data needs to be stored, made accessible, and made comparable over successive years.
7. A browse function, so that approved users could view the framework from a selected journal and/or publisher.
8. A search function, so that approved users could search for the framework for a specific journal/publisher.
9. A means by which approved users could download data.
10. A means by which approved users could visually compare up to three journals for all their services (akin to how shops selling electrical goods let you compare up to, say, three washing machines etc.).
11. A means by which approved users could compare a number of journals and/ or publishers with respect to individual service buckets/ data lines selected (journals/ publishers A, B and C ask prices X, Y and Z, respectively, for service S.
12. A means by which approved users could, over time, track how a specific journal/publisher performed in terms of the prices it charged and the services it offered.
13. Interoperability with other Plan S related services. For example, the Journal Checker Tool will indicate that a journal or publisher is compliant with Plan S and will need to know if price transparency requirements have been fulfilled.
14. A helpdesk to provide advice and support to publishers, potential users, and approved users. Queries would include those from publishers on how to prepare and submit data, and those from users about how to register, access, and use the data.
15. Modest communication and marketing of the service.
16. Quarterly reports to cOAlition S on key performance indicators such as number of publishers that have submitted data, number of publishers whose data have been returned, the number of users, and the nature and number of help desk use.

#### RFI Questions

Before commissioning the development of the service, the European Science Foundation wishes to solicit the views of potential suppliers and other informed parties regarding the feasibility of this procurement, and the likely approach that suppliers would take to satisfy the brief.

To that end, we would greatly appreciate your responses to the following questions, which should be completed using the response grid in [**Annex A**](#_Annex_A).

Although we are **not** setting word count limits on the answers, by way of guide we would expect that a completed Annex A should probably not exceed six pages.

1. Is the supplier aware of a system containing - in whole or in part - the key services described in this document which already exists or is currently being developed? If so, please provide details.
2. Can the supplier specifically articulate the approach they would take to:
3. validate that publisher submissions adhered to at least one of the cOAlition S-approved price and service transparency frameworks;
4. ensuring that publishers could **not** access each other’s price and service data through this system and what would happen if an error occurred;
5. ensuring that approved users could access this service;
6. providing data to approved users in a user-friendly way;
7. providing helpdesk support;
8. communications and marketing.
9. Do you envisage the Price Transparency Service interoperating with the Journal Checker Tool or any other services? If yes, which services, and what form would this interoperability take, and what dependencies would there be to make this happen?
10. The ambition is to have a system in place such that publishers can deposit data from 1st December 2021 and that approved users will be able to access this data from July 2022. If we are to honour this timeline, what is the latest practical date we would need to contract with a supplier to develop this service?
11. Having read the brief, and the key requirements, are there any other features you think would need to be developed to meet the objectives of this procurement? If so, please specify the desired, additional functionality.
12. Cost to develop and maintain the service:
13. What **approximate** budget would be necessary for the supplier to *develop* this service? How was this figure derived?
14. What **approximate** annual budget would be necessary for the supplier to *maintain* the service, including ingesting updated annual framework data from participating publishers, and for developing and implementing periodic updates to the frameworks, to ensure that they adhere to current standards and meets user needs? How was this figure derived?
15. Do you have any suggestions for ways to deliver this service at a lower cost?

#### Timetable

Below are the indicated timelines which this Request for Information (RFI) exercise is planned to run against:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| # | Activity | Responsibility | Target Date |
| 1 | RFI issue to suppliers | ESF | 19th October 2020 |
| 2 | Response to RFI | Suppliers | 30th November 2020 |
| 3 | RFI Evaluation | ESF | December 2020 |
| 4 | Potential RFP | ESF | Q1 2021 |

#1 – RFI Issue

The RFI document will be published on the cOAlition S website and promoted via social media.

#2 – Response to RFI

Suppliers will submit any questions they have about the RFI exercise to the ESF contact. The response to this RFI must be received by 09.00 CET on Monday 30th November.

#3 – RFI Evaluation

cOAlition S staff will evaluate the responses submitted by suppliers and potentially compile a Request for Procurement.

#4 – Potential RFP

Any RFP which is developed will be shared with all suppliers who responded to this RFI. The RFP will be also be made public, via the cOAlition S website.

#### Non-disclosure and confidentiality

The information contained within this document or subsequently made available to prospective suppliers is deemed confidential and must not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ESF unless required by law. Submissions to this RFI will also be treated in confidence.

#### Independent proposal

By submission of a proposal, prospective suppliers warrant that the prices in the proposal have been arrived at independently, without consultation, communication, agreement or understanding for the purpose of restricting competition, as to any matter relating to such prices, with any other potential supplier or with any competitor.

#### Costs incurred by prospective suppliers

It should be noted that this document relates to a Request for Information (RFI) only and does not represent a firm commitment from ESF to enter into a contractual agreement. In addition, ESF will not be held responsible for any costs associated with the production of a response to this Request for Proposal.

#### ESF contact details

The single point of contact within this RFI exercise for all communications is as indicated below:

Nora Papp- Le Roy

Programme Manager, cOAlition S

European Science Foundation

1, quai Lezay-Marnésia, BP 90015

67080 Strasbourg, Cedex – France

Website: [www.coalition-s.org](http://www.coalition-s.org/)

E-mail: [info@coalition-s.org](mailto:info@coalition-s.org)

#### Annex A

#### Price and Service Transparency Framework: building a service to provide access to publisher services and pricing data

#### *Response Grid*

Please submit the completed **Response Grid** to Nora Papp-Le Roy ([**info@coalition-s.org**](mailto:info@coalition-s.org))

in a Microsoft Word format no later than **Monday 30th November**, 09.00 CET.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Section 1: Contact information** | | | | |
| Name of organisation: | | | | *Click or tap here to enter text.* |
| Name of contact: | | | | *Click or tap here to enter text.* |
| Address: | | | | *Click or tap here to enter text.* |
| Email address: | | | | *Click or tap here to enter text.* |
| Telephone number | | | | *Click or tap here to enter text.* |
| **Section 2: RFI questions**  **Section 2.1 – Existing service?** | | | | |
| 2.1 | | | Is the supplier aware of a system containing - in whole or in part - the key services described in this document which already exists or is currently being developed? If so, please provide details. | |
| *Response* | | | *Click or tap here to enter text.* | |
| **Section 2.2 – Approach** | | | | |
| Can the supplier articulate the approach they would take to addressing the following: | | | | |
| 2.2.1 | | | validate that publisher submissions adhered to at least one of the cOAlition S-approved price and service transparency frameworks; | |
| *Response* | | | *Click or tap here to enter text.* | |
| 2.2.2 | | | ensuring that publishers could not access each other’s price and service data through this system and what would happen if an error occurred; | |
| *Response* | | | *Click or tap here to enter text.* | |
| 2.2.3 | | | ensuring that approved users could access this service; | |
| *Response* | | | *Click or tap here to enter text.* | |
| 2.2.4 | | | providing data to approved users in a user-friendly way; | |
| *Response* | | | *Click or tap here to enter text.* | |
| 2.2.5 | | | providing helpdesk support; | |
| *Response* | | | *Click or tap here to enter text.* | |
| 2.2.6 | | | communications and marketing. | |
| *Response* | | | *Click or tap here to enter text.* | |
| **Section 2.3 - Interoperability with JCT** | | | | |
| 2.3.1 | | | Do you envisage the Price Transparency Service interoperating with the Journal Checker Tool or any other services? If yes, which services, and what form would this interoperability take, and what dependencies would there be to make this happen? | |
| *Response* | | | *Click or tap here to enter text.* | |
| **Section 2.4 – Timeline** | | | | |
| 2.4.1 | | | The ambition is to have a system in place such that publishers can deposit data from 1st December 2021 and that approved users will be able to access this data from July 2022. If we are to honour this timeline, what is the latest practical date we would need to contract with a supplier to develop this service? | |
| *Response* | | | *Click or tap here to enter text.* | |
| **Section 2.5 – Missing elements?** | | | | |
| 2.5.1 | | | Having read the brief, and the key requirements, are there any other features you think would need to be developed to meet the objectives of this procurement? If so, please specify the desired, additional functionality. | |
| *Response* | | | *Click or tap here to enter text.* | |
| **Section 2.6 – Costs to develop and maintain the service** | | | | |
| 2.6.1 | What **approximate** budget would be necessary for the supplier to *develop* this service? How was this figure derived? | | | |
| *Response* | *Click or tap here to enter text.* | | | |
| 2.6.2 | What **approximate** annual budget would be necessary for the supplier to *maintain* the service, including ingesting updated annual framework data from participating publishers, and for developing and implementing periodic updates to the frameworks, to ensure that they adhere to current standards and meets user needs? How was this figure derived? | | | |
| *Response* | *Click or tap here to enter text.* | | | |
| **Section 2.7 – How could these costs be reduced?** | | | | |
| 2.7.1 | | Do you have any suggestions for ways to deliver this service at lower cost? | | |
| *Response* | | *Click or tap here to enter text.* | | |