Plan S
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Building a service to support cOAlition S's Price & Service Transparency Frameworks: an Invitation to Tender

1.0 Overview

cOAlition S members are seeking to identify a supplier who can build a secure, authentication-managed web-based service which will enable:

- **publishers** to upload data, in accord with one of the approved cOAlition S Price and Service Transparency Frameworks;

- **approved users** - defined below - to be able to login to this service and for a given journal, determine what services are provided and at what price;

- **approved users** to be able to select several journals and compare the services offered and prices charged by the different journals selected;

- **the Journal Checker Tool** (JCT) - via an API call - to determine whether a journal has (or has not) provided data in line with one of the approved Price and Service Transparency Frameworks.

Given that some of the data that will be made accessible through this service is considered sensitive, it is imperative that suppliers can build a secure service such 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 approved users that are **not** publishers.

Although the price and service transparency data which is made available through this service will **not** be made openly available, any code developed through this procurement, along with all documentation required for others to reuse it, must be made available under a liberal open source licence (MIT licence or equivalent).

This service must be functional – in terms of allowing publishers to upload their "Framework Reports" by 1st of December 2021. The service must be accessible to all approved users – including the JCT – by the 1st June 2022.

2.0 Background

The Guidance on the Implementation of Plan S specifies that:

"where Plan S requirements apply, no later than 1 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. A pilot study in early 2020 (which included participants from 10 publishers including Brill, The Company of Biologists, EMBO Press, PLOS, and Springer Nature) confirmed that the information sought could be provided *and* would be useful to the research community.

As such, the Information Power framework has been endorsed by the cOAlition S leadership. It consists of a data collection spreadsheet, and an implementation guide.

Independent of this work, the Fair Open Access Alliance (FOAA) developed a Publication Services and Fees framework which, to date, has been implemented by Frontiers, MIT Press, Copernicus and MDPI.

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.

cOAlition S has determined that from **1st July 2022**, only those publishers who adhere to at least one of the approved Frameworks (and provide these data to the service are seeking to procure) 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 can deposit data in line with either of the approved Frameworks.

Several 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
Publisher	Development (Company of Biologists)	MDPI
Publisher	F1000 Research	Frontiers

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

2.1 A sense of scale

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 one of the approved frameworks.

Although this means that 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. As such, the initial focus of this service will be on enabling these 200 publishers to deposit data in a secure way.

2.2 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, we will ensure that any system we support to collect and share the price and transparency framework data is developed in a way that fulfils competition law requirements.

The precise details will need to be determined by the appointed supplier, working in partnership with cOAlition S and potentially some publishers, but as a minimum we will require the system to provide a registration and authentication system, which would allow approved users to access these data but would not allow publishers to access their competitors' data.

2.3 Authorised users

To mitigate the risks that the provision of these data will breach competition laws (referenced in Section 2.2) authorised users will, at least for the purposes of the initial contract, be limited to the user groups, outlined in Table 2.

Recognising that anyone can claim to be from one of these groups, we also suggest how applications to access the system could be validated. To be clear, we are suggesting that a user who wishes to access the system is validated by some third party before they are given access to the system. The precise details of the validation process will need to be defined and implemented by the successful supplier.

#	User Group	How are access requests validated?	Estimated number of users
Data depositors			
1	Publishers (to deposit data)	The cOAlition S office will provide a list of publishers who will be invited to create an account to enable them to deposit data. Beyond this, other publishers can register for a deposit account. All publisher requests for a "data deposit account" will be approved by the cOAlition S office.	200
Data users			
1	cOAlition S funders	The cOAlition S office will provide a list of approved users.	30
2	All library consortia involved in negotiating publisher agreements which cOAlition S funded researchers may have access to	The cOAlition S office will provide a list of approved users. Beyond this, if *other* library consortia wish to request access, they would need to list their agreements in the ESAC registry and apply to access the Price & Service Transparency service. The cOAlition S office will work with ESAC to validate such requests. The cOAlition S office will manage this process and provide the appointed supplier with list of approved users.	50
3	All universities which host cOAlition S-funded researchers	Library consortia (identified in user category #2) will be asked to provide a list of universities – and a contact point - which participate in their agreements. The cOAlition S office will manage this process and provide the appointed supplier with list of approved users.	2500

Table 2: Authorised users and suggested validation process

3.0 Responding to the Invitation to Tender (ITT)

This document expands on the requirements outlined in Section 1.0 and provides details on the timeline for this procurement.

Suppliers (individual providers or consortia) interested in responding to this invitation to tender should apply, using the template, set out in **Annex A: Response form**.

The completed document should be sent (by email) to info@coalition-s.org, no later than **09.00 CEST Monday 7th June 2021.**

The criteria by which responses will be judged is set out in **Annex B**.

As set out in Table 3 below, we will be hosting a webinar on the 13th May 2021 at 17.00 CEST to answer any questions you may have about this procurement exercise. If you wish to take part in the webinar, please register here.

European Science Foundation reserves the right not to award a contract if no suitable supplier(s) is identified.

Table 3 shows an indicative timeline for this piece of work.

Activity	Date
Price and Service Transparency Service: **Invitation to Tender issued**	Monday 26th April 2021
Webinar/Q&A with potential suppliers – register here	Thursday 13th May 2021 at 17.00 CEST
Responses returned to cOAlition S by email	Monday 7th June 2021 at 09.00 CEST
Supplier interviews (via video conference)	w/c 14th June 2021
Preferred supplier identified - Intent to contract letter sent	Monday 28th June 2021
Contract for services signed	No later than 30th July 2021
Publisher portal (and related services) live	w/c 6th December 2021
Full product launch	1st June 2022

Table 3: Timeline

4.0 Statement of Requirements

cOAlition S requires a provider or consortium to build a secure, authentication-managed web-based service to support cOAlition S's Price and Service Transparency frameworks.

A 3-year contract will be issued in the first instance.

Detailed below (in Table 4) are the requirements that the service must deliver.

For each section (highlighted in orange) there is a description of the requirements and whether they are mandatory, highly desirable or desirable. At the end of each section there are additional questions suppliers **must** address in their responses. To be clear, suppliers who simply say that they can meet the requirements without providing the additional information requested **will receive lower scores than those suppliers which provide this information**.

Requirement Summary	Description	Requirement
1. Developing a registration system for publishers (data depositors) and authorised users (data users)		
1.1. Developing and implementing a registration system	The supplier must provide a means by which **publishers** and **data users** can register to use this service.	Mandatory
1.2. A **publisher** registration page	The system must provide a means by which publishers can **register** with the service, to enable them to subsequently upload data in line with one of the approved Price and Service Transparency Frameworks.	Mandatory
1.3. A **publisher** approval process	The system must provide a means by which registration requests can be approved or declined by the cOAlition S office *(i.e. login as administrator to approve/decline requests. See Section 2 for details.)*	Mandatory
1.4. Confirmation of **publisher** registration	Once a publisher has submitted a valid registration, the system must send an email confirming the registration.	Mandatory
1.5. A **data user** registration page	The system must provide a means by which a **data user** –as defined in Table 2, categories 1-3 – can apply to **register** with the service.	Mandatory
1.6. A **data user** approval process	The system must provide a means by which registration requests can be approved or declined by the cOAlition S office *(i.e. login as administrator to approve/decline requests. See Section 2 for details.)*	Mandatory

1.7. Confirmation of **data user** registration	Once a data user registration has been approved/declined by the cOAlition S office, the system must notify the requester.	Mandatory
1.8. Archiving declined data user requests	Data user requests which are declined should be removed from the user database and archived for 12 months and then automatically deleted.	Mandatory
1.9. Sharing aggregated registration data with cOAlition S	It must be possible for the supplier to share aggregated data showing the number of publishers and approved authorised users registered with the system and in which country they are based.	Mandatory
Supplier response to address the following:	*Suppliers must:* (i) *Indicate any problems/risks with the registration process described above and how these could be resolved/mitigated.* (ii) *Highlight any best practices they would implement to ensure that the publisher contact had the authority/mandate to deposit data on behalf of that publisher (i.e., when inviting a publisher to register, should we provide them with a unique code which they have to cite in their submission)?* (iii) *Outline how the registration process could, if required, be extended to include more user groups.* (iv) *If the application process was extended to include more groups, how would the supplier develop the system to remove the need to the cOAlition S office to "approve/decline" every request?*	
2. Providing an authentication system such that registered users could access the Price and Transparency Framework system		
2.1 Authenticated login	Once a publisher or authorised user has registered with the system, they must be able to use that account to login on the service	Mandatory
2.2 Accept Terms and Conditions – Publishers (data depositors)	**Publishers** must agree to a set Terms and Conditions (to be developed by cOAlition S) – which requires them to agree how their data will be used – before they can access the service. If these Terms & Conditions are not agreed to, access to the system (to deposit data) must be denied.	Mandatory

2.3	Accept Terms and Conditions – data users	**Data users** must agree to a set Terms and Conditions (to be developed by cOAlition S) – which must be agreed to – before they can access the service. If these Terms & Conditions are not agreed to, access to the system must be denied.	Mandatory
2.4	Reset password	The service must provide a means by which an approved user and a publisher can reset their password.	Mandatory
2.5	Edit account functionality	The service must provide a means by which an approved user (including a publisher), can edit their account and change details such as their email address, password and any user-specific details.	Mandatory
2.6	Publisher account linked to publisher deposits	Over time the account holder for the publisher may change. The system must allow that the **new** publisher account can access the data previously deposited by that publisher. (*i.e., If a.smith@publishera.org is replaced by b.jones@publishera.org then b.jones must be able to access data deposited by a.smith*)	Mandatory
2.7	No access unless authenticated	It must **not** be possible to either deposit data (publisher) or the access data (authorised user) without an authenticated login.	Mandatory
2.8	Permissions	As a minimum, the system must support three types of user: (i) cOAlition S administrator - who has access to all data and has the right to accept/decline requests to use the service. (ii) Publishers - whose permissions must be limited to uploading data and viewing their own data. **Publishers must not be able to see other publisher's data under any circumstances**. (iii) Approved users - who must be able to access all publisher-uploaded data.	Mandatory
Supplier response to address the following:		*Suppliers must outline:* *(i) Their experience of providing authentication managed services.* *(ii) Indicate to what extent a valid registration could be linked to a third-party single sign-on system. i.e., a librarian may wish to associate their institutional login to this service.*	

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	(iii) What do you see as the key risks around authentication? (iv) How would you mitigate these risks to give confidence to publishers that competitors would not be able to access their data? (v) Outline any other processes you would implement to give confidence to publishers that competitors would not be able to access their data?	

3. Provision of a publisher portal

3.1 Provision of a publisher portal	The supplier must develop a means by which an authenticated publisher can upload their data in line with one of the approved frameworks for price and service transparency frameworks	Mandatory
3.2 Timestamping the submission	The supplier must develop a process by process by which publisher-submitted data can be time stamped. The first data upload we will call "year 0". *At this moment in time, the system will **not** need to check submission for completeness.*	Mandatory
3.3 Viewing submitted data	The system must provide a means by which a publisher can view the data they have submitted.	Mandatory
3.4 Updating a submission	The system must provide a means by which a publisher can update or replace a submission.	Mandatory
3.5 Reminders to update	10 months on from the submission of Year 0 data the system must send an email reminding them that Year 2 data must be deposited within 2 months, and so on.	Mandatory
3.6 Retaining archival data	The supplier must develop an archival function such that year 0 data is NOT overwritten by year 1 data etc; all data needs to be stored, made accessible, and made comparable over successive years. Data retention policies must adhere to GDPR requirements.	Mandatory
Supplier response to address the following:	*Suppliers must:* i) *Indicate if there are any other processes or services they would seek develop to streamline the submission of publisher data to make it easier to submit and for data users to access* ii) *Outline (in high level terms) the technical architecture they would deploy to meet the above requirements.*	

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4. Provision of a user portal to access the Price and Service Transparency data		
4.1 Provision of a user portal	The supplier must develop a means by which an authenticated approved user can access the Price and Service Transparency data.	Mandatory
4.2 Browse function	It must be possible to browse the data by journal name and publisher (i.e., "I want to see the Price and Service Transparency data for e.g. PLOS One" or "I want to see the Price and Service Transparency data for all PLOS journals)"	Mandatory
4.3 Search function (basic)	It must be possible to search the data, as a minimum by journal name and publisher	Mandatory
4.4 Search function (advanced)	Beyond the basic search (4.3) it would be highly desirable if it was possible to search across **multiple data points and across multiple years**. i.e., which journals have a median time from submission to publication of less than 100 days, and where the total publishing costs are less than $3000? i.e., Undertake the above search but compare 2024 data with that of 2023.	Highly desirable
4.5 Viewing data	Once a user has completed a search/browse they must be able to view the Price and Service Transparency Data supplied by the publisher.	Mandatory
4.6 Download data option	The service must provide means by which approved users could download data.	Mandatory
4.7 Downloaded data: applying Terms and Conditions	When data is downloaded the Terms and Conditions (as agreed at login) must be included as a text package along with the data.	Mandatory
4.8 Downloading data: recording who downloaded the data	The system must keep an audit trail as to what data was downloaded, when and by whom.	Mandatory
4.9 Comparing the prices and services journals offer on one screen	The service must provide a means by which approved users could visually compare the prices and services for up to 5 journals in one view. By way of example this could take the approach an electrical goods supplier let you compare different washing machines.	Mandatory

4.10	Comparing the prices and services, based on specific criteria	The service should provide a way in which approved users could compare a number of journals and/ or publishers with respect to individual service buckets/ data lines selected. i.e., "For journal A, B and C (which has supplied data in line with the Information Power framework) show me the journal name (derived from the ISSN,), the APC list price, median time from acceptance to publication and the price breakdown for peer review and marketing"	Highly desirable
4.11	Service over time	The service should provide 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.	Highly desirable
Supplier response to address the following:		*Suppliers must outline:* (i) *Their experience in providing users with a rich search experience.* (ii) *What they envisage a journal comparison feature would look like.* (iii) *How they would seek to provide a comparison tool when journal A used the Information Power Framework and journal B used the FOAA framework.* (iv) *Would you be able to develop those features categorised as "highly desirable"? Describe any challenges you foresee.* (v) *Suppliers are invited to indicate any other developments they would seek to implement to add further value to the user portal.*	

5. API for the Journal Checker Tool

5.1 API for the JCT	The Journal Checker Tool will need to be able to query the Price and Service Transparency service to determine is a journal is providing data in line with one of the Price and Service Transparency Frameworks or not.	Mandatory
Supplier response to address the following	*Suppliers must outline:* (i) *Your experience at developing APIs.* (ii) *Whether, in your opinion, there are other use cases which could be accommodated through API calls, which go far beyond the use case described here and if so, describe what they are and why they should be developed.*	

6. User interface		
6.1 Website	The website should be easy to navigate with a clean, simple design.	Mandatory
6.2 Accessibility requirements	The webpages developed through this service must meet all relevant EU accessibility requirements necessary to enable persons with disabilities to use this service.	Mandatory
6.3 Mobile friendly	The webpage should be accessible and fully functional on mobile devices.	Highly Desirable
6.4 Additional information	In addition to developing the registration pages, publisher portal and user portal, the site should provide the opportunity to include a FAQ, solicit feedback, and provide contact information.	Mandatory
Supplier response to address the following	*Suppliers must outline:* (i) *Experience (with examples) of websites which are mobile friendly, meet all relevant EU accessibility requirements and are easy to use.* (ii) *Indicate if you be able to develop those features categorised as "highly desirable"? Describe any challenges you foresee.*	
7. Code & system architecture		
7.1 Code developed under this project must be openly licensed	Software created under this project must be openly licensed, using the MIT licence.	Mandatory
7.2 System architecture	The architecture of the system must be extensible and scalable.	Mandatory
Supplier response to address the following	*Suppliers must:* (i) *Describe the system architecture the service would use, highlighting any key software dependencies.*	

8. Support, SLA, reports, change control, project management and risks		
8.1 Support	The supplier must provide 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.	Mandatory
8.2 SLA	The appointed supplier must provide a Service Level Agreement including but not limited to uptime objectives, maintenance and support protocols, response times (from outage through to client and user queries).	Mandatory
8.3 Management reports	The appointed supplier must provide quarterly reports to cOAlition S on key performance indicators such as number of publishers that have submitted data, the number of users, and the nature and number of help desk use.	Mandatory
8.4 Change control	The appointed supplier must outline a process in which additional developments could be considered and accommodated within the Price and Service Transparency Service.	Mandatory
8.5 Project Management	The appointed supplier must provide a project plan, including key milestones.	Mandatory
8.6 Risk Register	The appointed supplier must provide a risk register, which includes details of the risk, their likelihood/severity and mitigation strategies.	Mandatory
8.7 Contact	Please provide a copy of your standard contract.	Mandatory
Supplier response to address the following	*Suppliers must provide:* (i) *Details of the levels of support you offer. Costs related to support must be disclosed (see Section 9).* (ii) *A copy of your standard SLA, which should include details of what happens when the SLA terms are not met.* (iii) *Details of the change control process that would be followed.* (iv) *A project plan.* (v) *A risk register.* (vi) *A copy of your standard contract.*	

9. Cost		
9.1 Cost	Provide a total cost to develop and manage this service for three years. • Year 1: Contract date (assume 1st July 2021) - 30th June 2022 • Year 2: 1st July 2022 - 30th June 2023 • Year 3: 1st July 2023 - 30th June 2024	Mandatory
Supplier response to address the following	*Your response must include a full break down of both the **development costs** and **support/maintenance costs**, for years 1, 2 and 3.* *The **development** costs must include the costs to develop **all** the **mandatory** requirements detailed above.* *The response must also provide a fixed cost to develop all the **highly desirable** requirements detailed above. This item should be separately identified.* *If the supplier wishes to suggest **other** developments, these costs must also be shown separately.* *The response should also include a rate card showing the day rate you charge (in €) for the following activities.* • *Project Management* • *Software development* • *Software testing and deployment* • *Other (please specify)*	

Table 4: Statement of Requirements

5.0 Budget

Providers or consortia responding to this Statement of Requirements must provide a full cost breakdown for developing and hosting/supporting this service over a three-year period. See Table 4, Section 9 for details.

A contract will be issued to the appointed Provider (or lead member of a Consortium), by the European Science Foundation. Payments will be linked to the delivery of milestones, which will be agreed with the Provider or Consortium.

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6.0 Working with cOAlition S

The primary contact for the appointed Supplier will be the cOAlition S Programme Manager. A Task Force of cOAlition S members also exists to support the development of this service. The appointed Supplier will need to work with this group and, in the development phase, provide updates at monthly virtual meetings.