

How Equitable Is It?

A DRAFT FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING
SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION MODELS ON
THE AXIS OF EQUITY

Developed by the “[Beyond article-based charges](#)” working group,
which is convened by [cOAlition S](#), [Jisc](#) and [PLOS](#).

Introduction

Since September 2023, cOAlition S, in partnership with Jisc and PLOS, have been working with a [multi-stakeholder working group](#), comprising librarians, library consortia representatives, funders and publishers. The Group's objectives, detailed in our original [problem statement](#), centred around a desire to move away from inequitable article-based models and arrangements to facilitate more equitable participation in knowledge sharing.

To this end, the Group have developed a framework, which will enable stakeholders (institutions, libraries, consortia, funders and publishers) to assess scholarly communication models and arrangements on the **axis of equity** and use this to steer either investment or scholarly communication model-development decisions.

Presented as an online tool – and strongly inspired by the “[How Open Is It?](#)” guide developed by SPARC, PLOS and OASPA – the “**How Equitable Is It?**” framework will enable:

- those who fund or invest in publishing services – **primarily institutions, library consortia and funders** – to determine to what extent scholarly communication models and arrangements facilitate (or restrict) equitable participation in knowledge sharing; and
- those who seek funding for their publishing services – **publishers and other providers** – to assess whether the scholarly communication models and arrangements they offer facilitate (or restrict) equitable participation in scholarship.

Note that this framework is primarily concerned with charging models and how these relate to equitable participation in scholarship. For this reason, it references funding flows to speak to the investments made and received.

How to use the tool

The “How Equitable Is It?” framework aims to provide a simple online tool for stakeholders in the scholarly communication ecosystem to evaluate and compare scholarly communication models and arrangements. This will help them make informed investment decisions and direct funding to promote equitable participation in scholarship.

The tool is available at <https://coalitions.typeform.com/Equity-Tool>

The framework does not try to prescribe a solution to make scholarly publishing equitable, but rather gives the user the opportunity to consider various criteria to assess models on the axis of equity. It is publisher model-agnostic and our hope is that it can also prove educational, i.e. publishers can identify where their models are potentially inequitable whilst funders and institutions can more easily see how their investments aid participation in knowledge sharing.

To evaluate how equitable a scholarly communication model is, the user is asked to consider seven criteria and for each one, score the specific model they are assessing, using the scale below:

- **“Least equitable” (1 point)**
- **“Somewhat equitable” (3 points)**
- **“Most equitable” (5 points)**

Each criterion is accompanied by a definition to explain its context and connection to equity. If all seven criteria are scored, then the total score will be between 7 and 35 points.

While the framework is designed as a whole, (i.e. the criteria are intended to cumulatively build a picture of how equitable a model is), if a criterion is not relevant, or the user doesn't have the knowledge to assess it, this can be indicated. Selecting the “I don't know” option results in a score of 0 points for that criterion, and the total possible score is reduced by 5 points.

On completion of the assessment, the tool will automatically calculate the model's overall equity final score and provide a summary of the answers given.

Assessment criteria

Criterion 1: Access to read

Why is this criterion important in assessing equity?

All research outputs should be accessible to everyone, in perpetuity, irrespective of their financial means. The more people that can discover and access knowledge the more it can be used and built upon, benefiting science and society.

- **Least equitable (1 point):**
This funding flow does not enable everyone to access all content for free
- **Somewhat Equitable (3 points):**
This funding flow enables *conditional* or partial access to content for free. For example, free access might be limited to:
 - i) readers affiliated with a particular group, or
 - ii) based in a specific location, or
 - iii) is time limited or
 - iv) limited to certain article types.
- **Most Equitable (5 points):**
This funding flow supports the publication of content that anyone can access and read for free (i.e. there are no financial barriers to reading)

Criterion 2: Publishing immediate Open Access

Why is this criterion important in assessing equity?

All researchers should be able to publish immediate open access, irrespective of their financial means. Publishing open access ensures that anyone can access this research immediately, maximizing its impact.

- **Least equitable (1 point):**
This funding flow means all authors must pay a fee to publish Open Access and that those without the necessary funds must request and justify a waiver.
- **Somewhat Equitable (3 points):**
This funding flow means the ability to publish open access is contingent, such as being affiliated with a participating institution, or being funded by a particular funder, or being in a specific location.
- **Most Equitable (5 points):**
This funding flow supports the ability for anyone to publish open access without paying any fees and without the need for waivers.

Criterion 3: Maximizing participation

Why is this criterion important in assessing equity?

In alignment with criterion 2 (publishing immediate open access) models which enable, encourage and maximize participation in scholarly communication are considered more equitable than those which do not.

- **Least equitable (1 point):**

The calculation of this funding flow is structured in a way that **limits participation** and may be considered less inclusive because:

- Uses per-unit payments, i.e. APCs as a basis for the calculation
- Local geographic and economic situations are ignored in publishing costs calculations
- Limits are imposed on how many outputs can be published by any participant
- Only one factor (such as affiliation of the corresponding author) is used to determine author eligibility to participate
- Prices are set on what the market can bear, or fees paid previously, rather than actual costs
- Contributions from “read only” institutions are ignored/not sought

- **Somewhat Equitable (3 points):**

The calculation of this funding flow is structured in a way that considers **some** of the following to enable participation and be more inclusive:

- Does not utilise per unit-payments, i.e. APCs are not used as a basis for funding contributions
- Local geographic and economic situations are used to inform pricing calculations, such as the Purchasing Power Parity framework, developed by Information Power
- Does not impose a limit on how many outputs can be published by any participants

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- Uses more than one factor to determine the eligibility to participate (e.g. not just the affiliation of the corresponding author)
 - Prices levied reflect actual costs, not what the market can bear
 - Contributions from both institutions that publish and those that can be considered “read only”, are actively sought

- **Most Equitable (5 points):**

The calculation of this funding flow is structured in a way that maximises participation and can be considered more inclusive because it does **most** (at least 4) of the following:

- Does not utilise per-unit payments, i.e. APCs are not used as a basis for funding contributions
- Local geographic and economic situations are used to inform pricing calculations, such as the Purchasing Power Parity framework, developed by Information Power
- Does not impose a limit on how many outputs can be published by any participants
- Uses more than one factor to determine the eligibility to participate (e.g. not just the affiliation of the corresponding author)
- Prices reflect actual costs, not what the market can bear
- Contributions from both institutions that publish and those that can be considered “read only” are actively sought

Criterion 4: Re-use rights

Why is this criterion important in assessing equity?

Authors should be able to use their works, including determining how they are disseminated and re-used, in any way they see fit. Readers should be able to build upon and re-use published research (subject only to the norms of academic attribution) irrespective of their financial means. Licences such as CC BY (or equivalent) maximize the opportunity for sharing and reuse for the benefit of science and society, at the same time as acknowledging and ensuring attribution of author contribution.

- **Least equitable (1 point):**

Select this option if **both** of the following situations arise:

- i) This funding flow leads to an outcome where no content can be downloaded or reused, without negotiating a separate licence agreement
- ii) Authors are presented with language or licence terms that undermine the assertion of prior rights or the author's original licence choice

- **Somewhat Equitable (3 points):**

Select this option if **either** of the following situations arise:

- i) This funding flow leads to an outcome where the applicable licenses facilitate *some* but not full reuse
- ii) Authors are presented with language or licence terms that undermine the assertion of prior rights or the author's original licence choice

- **Most Equitable (5 points):**

Select this option if **both** of the following situations arise:

- i) This funding flow supports the ability for *anyone* to download all content without any restrictions and reuse it any way they choose, subject to the norms of academic attribution
- ii) Authors are presented with language or licence terms that respect their original licence choice and/or prior rights on their manuscripts

Criterion 5: Pricing and fee transparency

Why is this criterion important in assessing equity?

Transparent prices and fees for scholarly communication services allow organisations, institutions and funders to make better-informed investment decisions. Transparency is crucial to delivering value for money, cutting waste and inefficiency, and ensuring money is spent effectively.

- **Least equitable (1 point):**

The calculation of this funding flow and the way the funding will be used is not disclosed.

- **Somewhat Equitable (3 points):**

The calculation of this funding flow, and the way the funding will be used, is somewhat transparent, fulfilling **some but not all** of the following:

- Fees or contributions charged are publicly disclosed
- The rationale for the calculation of the fee/contribution and any subsequent increases or changes is transparent and comprehensible. For example, information on the breakdown of services provided and the prices charged are shared through services such as the cOAlition S's [Journal Comparison Service](#) (or equivalent).

- **Most Equitable (5 points):**

The calculation of this funding flow and the way the funding will be used is completely transparent, meaning that:

- All fees or contributions charged are publicly disclosed
- The rationale for the calculation of the fee/contribution and any subsequent increases or changes is transparent and comprehensible. For example, information on the breakdown of services provided and the prices charged are shared through services such as the cOAlition S's [Journal Comparison Service](#) (or equivalent).

Open Research

The final two criteria to score are both related to promoting and encouraging open research practices.

In 2022, [UNESCO](#) concluded that “Open Science has the potential to make the scientific process more transparent, inclusive and democratic.” Scholarly publishing, however, is still focused on articles. Data, code, and other important research outputs are not visible in the current scholarly record, reducing reproducibility. Moreover, researchers who follow Open Science principles (to make these outputs accessible) are not rewarded.

The Working Group strongly believe that if we are to move away from inequitable, APC-based publication models that embed the article as the primary research output, then open research practices will need to be incentivised, encouraged and rewarded.

Criterion 6: Promoting and encouraging open research practices: data and code

Why is this criterion important in assessing equity?

Promoting and encouraging the sharing of data and code enables others to validate this information, aiding reproducibility and increasing its accuracy and reliability. The ability to scrutinise such outputs helps to increase public trust in research findings and demonstrates the value of funding research to society at large.

From an equity perspective, the open availability of data and code ensures that everyone has the potential to build on the work of others, fostering new ideas and discoveries.

- **Least equitable (1 point):**
Regarding open research practices:
 - Data availability statements are not encouraged or signposted
 - The sharing of underlying data is not encouraged or signposted
 - The sharing of underlying code is not encouraged or signposted
- **Somewhat Equitable (3 points):**
The funding flow promotes or encourages **some (but not all)** of the following open research practices:
 - Data availability statements are encouraged, but are not mandated
 - The sharing of underlying data is encouraged but not mandated
 - The sharing of underlying code is encouraged but not mandated
- **Most Equitable (5 points):**
The funding flow promotes or encourages **all** of the following open research practices:
 - All research articles include a data availability statement
 - The sharing of underlying data is mandatory
 - The sharing of underlying code is mandatory

Criterion 7: Promoting and encouraging open research practices: preprints, preprint review and open identifiers

Why is this criterion important in assessing equity?

The sharing of preprints, along with their reviews and the use of open identifiers, all help to promote a more open, efficient, and collaborative research environment. From an equity perspective, the posting of preprints enables researchers to share findings more quickly, making the process more open and accelerating knowledge sharing. It also ensures that these findings are available to all, and never hidden behind a paywall.

- **Least equitable (1 point):**

With reference to open research practices regarding preprints and open peer review:

- The posting of preprints is neither encouraged and not facilitated by the publisher/service provider
- The reviews of any/all preprints selected for peer review, are not publicly posted, irrespective of whether an article is selected for formal publication in a journal
- The publisher/service provider uses closed, proprietary identifiers

- **Somewhat Equitable (3 points):**

The funding flow promotes or encourages **some (but not all)** of the following open research practices:

- The posting of preprints is encouraged and facilitated by the publisher/service provider
- The reviews of all preprints selected for peer review, are publicly posted, irrespective of whether an article is selected for formal publication in a journal
- The publisher/service provider uses open (non-proprietary) identifiers, such as ROR and ORCID

- **Most Equitable (5 points):**

The funding flow promotes or encourages **all** of the following open research practices:

- The posting of preprints is encouraged and facilitated by the publisher/service provider
- The reviews of all preprints selected for peer review, are publicly posted, irrespective of whether an article is selected for formal publication in a journal
- The publisher/service provider uses open (non-proprietary) identifiers, such as ROR and ORCIDs

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Feedback on the “How Equitable Is It?” framework

This version of the “How Equitable Is It?” framework is presented as a DRAFT. If you would like to provide feedback – with a focus on how the criterion could be developed to increase the utility of the tool – please use the form at:

<https://coalitions.typeform.com/Equity-Feedback>

Feedback is due by the 28th October 2024. The Working Group will review all input and publish a revised version in early 2025.

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