JLSC

ISSN 2162-3309 | JLSC is published by the Iowa State University Digital Press | http://jlsc-pub.org

Volume 14, 1 (2026)

Values and Viability, Principles and Practice: A Survey of Journal Editors' Decision-Making Factors

Michelle E. Wilson

Wilson, M.E. (2026). Values and Viability, Principles and Practice: A Survey of Journal Editors' Decision-Making Factors. *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*, 14(1), eP24524. https://doi.org/10.31274/jlsc.24524

This article underwent fully anonymous peer review in accordance with JLSC's peer review policy.

© 2026 The Author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

ISSN 2162-3309 10.31274/jlsc.24524

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Values and Viability, Principles and Practice: A Survey of Journal Editors' Decision-Making Factors

Michelle E. Wilson
University of Maryland

ABSTRACT

Introduction: This study examines how journal editors and decision-makers balance values-based commitments to open access (OA) with the practical constraints they face when selecting publishers and publishing models.
Methods: In spring 2024, a survey was distributed via professional networks to scholarly journal editors. 117 responses were collected across a range of journal disciplines, publisher types, and access models. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 participants.
Results: Editors reported that subscription revenue, especially for society-owned journals, is critical for sustaining publications and wider society activities, limiting willingness to transition to fully OA models. Across the sample, disciplinary prevalence of OA was a stronger predictor of how important OA capabilities were in publisher choice than individual editor values. Respondents placed high importance on both editorial autonomy and production and technical support.
Discussion: The findings suggest that economic dependencies and disciplinary norms frequently outweigh values-based decision making. Editors view eliminating article processing charges and securing reliable production support as more compelling incentives to change publishers than the promise of OA alone. Library- and other academy-owned publishers must therefore match or exceed commercial service levels while offering partnership models that preserve journal identity and society sustainability.
Conclusion: This study has implications for library publishers, scholarly societies, and other noncommercial publishing initiatives by highlighting the specific conditions under which editors are willing to consider new partnerships. Understanding discipline-specific needs and/or current experiences with publishers may help publishers to attract and onboard journals to academy-owned platforms and to develop strategies for collective action with new centralized service models.

Keywords: library publishing, scholarly societies, open access, journal publishing, journal editors

Received: 02/28/2026 Accepted: 04/17/2026

© 2026 The Author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

1. By demonstrating that disciplinary norms and local open access cultures heavily influence what options editors view as realistic, the article encourages practitioners to design policies and services that are tailored to specific fields instead of relying on universal models of change.
2. Findings identify concrete levers for action, such as eliminating article processing charges, providing dependable production support, and protecting journal identity, giving scholarly communication professionals clearer pathways to onboarding journals to OA and library publishing programs.
3. For readers engaged in outreach, negotiation, or program building, the study underscores that moving journals toward academy-owned or community-controlled publishing will depend on sustained relationship-building that addresses risk, stability, and workload concerns.

INTRODUCTION

Academic journal publishing stands at a critical juncture. While the open access (OA) movement has achieved significant policy victories and values-based commitments to open knowledge continue to grow within the academic community, the actual landscape of journal publishing reveals a more complicated picture. Large commercial publishers (particularly the "Big Five" of Elsevier, Springer Nature, Wiley, SAGE, and Taylor & Francis) continue to control approximately 50% of all research output and maintain profit margins that rival technology giants (Montgomery et al., 2025). Meanwhile, scholarly societies and independent journals face mounting pressures as subscription revenues that support not only publication but also conferences, member services, and early career programs come under threat from the push toward OA.

Library publishing programs and other academy-owned publishing initiatives have emerged as potential alternatives to commercial publishing, grounded in shared academic values and community governance. However, successfully attracting journals to these partnerships requires a deep understanding of what editors and journal decision-makers actually need and value, and not just what advocates believe they should prioritize.

This study addresses a gap in existing research by directly surveying journal editors and decision-makers about their priorities, motivations, and willingness to make various compromises when considering publisher changes. While previous research has examined author publishing decisions (Niles et al., 2020), barriers to OA adoption (Kaliuzhna et al., 2025), and

the economics of scholarly society publishing (Willinsky, 2006), less attention has been paid to the organizational and institutional dynamics that shape editorial board decisions across different publisher types, disciplines, and access models.

Understanding these dynamics is essential not only for independent or library publishing programs seeking to develop compelling service offerings, but also for broader collective action efforts aimed at creating sustainable, equitable alternatives to commercial publishing dominance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The economics of scholarly society publishing

Academic journal publishing has undergone significant transformation over the past century. The commercialization of scholarly journals accelerated dramatically in the post-World War II period, driven by national aspirations to control and exploit scientific knowledge for strategic and economic purposes. Throughout the late 20th century, academic publishing experienced significant commercial consolidation, resulting in the current "Big Five" publishers: Elsevier, Springer Nature, Wiley, SAGE, and Taylor & Francis. Together, these presses control roughly half of global journal output and capture a disproportionate share of library spending, while individual firms such as Elsevier have reported profit margins approaching 40% in recent years (Montgomery et al., 2025). These figures highlight how a relatively small number of commercial actors extract substantial profit from scholarly communication while exercising outsized influence over the infrastructure through which research is produced, circulated, and assessed.

The financial architecture of scholarly society publishing presents distinct challenges for OA transitions. Scholarly societies have long relied on journal-derived income to support not only publication costs but also broader organizational activities such as conferences, advocacy, member services, and early career scholar programs (Dyson et al., 2019). Survey work with learned societies in the UK similarly indicates that many organizations face a "revenue crisis," with journal income still underwriting core society functions even as subscription and licensing markets shift (Johnson & Greaves, 2025). Earlier financial studies found that, for U.S. scholarly associations, subscription sales outside of membership typically covered roughly three-quarters of publishing costs (Willinsky, 2006). Society publishing encompasses a vast array of models and operational scales. Large, laboratory-intensive societies in fields such as chemistry or engineering often operate at revenue levels that more closely resemble commercial publishers, whereas many societies function with far leaner budgets and smaller circulations. The journals represented in this study skew toward that latter group of small to

mid-scale societies and independent titles, but, across the spectrum, societies face legitimate concerns that transitioning to OA could threaten organizational viability, reduce journal quality due to resource constraints, and undermine their ability to support member services and early career scholars (Willinsky, 2006).

OA PUBLISHING

OA mandates and policy drivers

Government and funder mandates have emerged as powerful forces reshaping the scholarly publishing landscape. The European Commission's Plan S, launched by cOAlition S, requires immediate OA publication for all research funded by participating organizations (Plan S, n.d.). Plan S explicitly opposes hybrid OA models and discontinued support for "transformative journals" by the end of 2024, firmly pushing funded researchers toward full OA options. In the United States, the 2022 White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) memorandum mandated that federal agencies eliminate the optional 12-month publication embargo, requiring federally funded peer-reviewed research articles to be made freely available and publicly accessible by default in agency-designated repositories (Nelson, 2022). Federal agencies were expected to post updated public access policies by December 31, 2024, with implementation required by December 31, 2025.

These mandates have significant implications for journal editors and publishers. Government funders' mandates in the U.S. and European Union have been major drivers pushing their fields toward OA models and infrastructures that facilitate high-volume, highly-visible publishing. In practice, many compliance strategies have relied on article processing charge (APC)–funded OA and large-scale 'transformative' or 'read-and-publish' agreements that are typically negotiated with major commercial publishers (Borrego, 2023; Ross-Hellauer et al., 2021). These arrangements can inadvertently privilege large, incumbent publishers by channeling institutional OA funds and authors toward established publishers and titles. As funders and institutions tighten technical and reporting requirements around public access, publishers with robust submission systems, metadata workflows, and repository-integration capabilities are better positioned to meet those expectations, while smaller presses, societies, and library programs often struggle to match that level of infrastructural capacity. As a result, policies designed to expand openness can also accelerate consolidation by reinforcing the advantages of well-resourced commercial platforms.

These mandates have significant implications for journal editors and publishers. Government funders' mandates in the U.S. and European Union have been major drivers pushing their fields toward OA models and infrastructures that facilitate high-volume, highly visible

publishing. However, these same mandates can create unintended consequences, potentially accelerating consolidation among commercial publishers who possess the technical infrastructure to support compliant publishing at scale.

Alternative publishing models: Diamond OA and collective action

Diamond OA has emerged as an alternative model that eliminates financial barriers for both authors and readers. Under this model, publications are freely accessible online with neither subscription fees for readers nor APCs for authors. Diamond OA initiatives are typically operated by academic institutions, scholarly communities, or research networks, emphasizing scholarly integrity, transparency, and collaboration over profit.

UNESCO has promoted diamond OA as supporting multilingual publishing and cultural inclusivity, fostering bibliodiversity, and enabling knowledge sharing across linguistic and cultural boundaries (UNESCO, n.d.). This model particularly supports researchers in low-resource regions, aligning with equity-focused Sustainable Development Goals. However, diamond OA requires sustainable funding mechanisms, often relying on institutional support, government funding, or nonprofit organizations to cover publication costs.

Research applying collective action theory to scholarly publishing transitions emphasizes the need for bilateral trust between libraries and publishers: libraries must provide assurances of sustained financial support, while societies must experiment with moving beyond traditional subscription models. Initiatives such as the Society Publishers Coalition and the Society Publishers Accelerating Open Access and Plan S (SPA-OPS) project have begun to map viable business models and transformative agreements for small and medium-sized societies, but their reports also underscore that libraries and societies often lack shared data, vocabulary, and visibility into each other's costs and risks (Wise & Estelle, 2020). As a result, education, shared toolkits, and continued experimentation with cooperative agreements remain necessary to translate collective-action principles into sustainable, operational partnerships.

Case studies from the University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing offer a concrete example of how library programs can structure sustainable partnerships with small scholarly societies. Molls (2022) describes a dedicated library publishing unit that provides diamond Open Access journal publishing with no author fees, uses externally hosted platforms such as OJS and WordPress, and charges modest fees that primarily cover direct costs while allowing societies to retain ownership and editorial control. Building on a formal philosophy of service, business plan, and dedicated budget outlined by McCready & Molls (2018), the program targets small, often volunteer-run societies in niche or underrepresented fields whose journals might otherwise shutter or be absorbed by commercial publishers, and supplies the

production support, policy guidance, and workflow infrastructure those societies lack. Read alongside work on collective action and society–library transitions, this model demonstrates that library publishing can move beyond pilot projects toward structured, contract-based partnerships that directly address the needs and constraints articulated by editors in this study.

Author and editor decision-making in journal selection

A substantial body of research has examined how scholars select journals for publishing their own work, providing relevant context for understanding editorial decision-making. Multiple studies show that authors weigh journal reputation and impact factor, publishing speed, OA options, article processing charge costs, and alignment with tenure and promotion expectations (Tenopir et al., 2016; Niles et al., 2020; Shopovski & Marolov, 2017). Niles and colleagues' widely cited study on "why we publish where we publish" further demonstrates that faculty decisions reflect both professional advancement concerns and personal values regarding knowledge dissemination, highlighting a tension between principle-based and normative considerations (Niles et al., 2020). However, the relationship between scholars' values as authors and their priorities when acting as journal editors or board members remains underexplored.

Research on motivations for publishing in OA venues similarly points to a mix of ideological commitments and practical concerns. Authors cite principles of knowledge equity and increased visibility as motivations for choosing OA journals, while simultaneously worrying about journal quality, reputation, and the fit of OA venues with local reward structures (Tenopir et al., 2016; Kaliuzhna et al., 2025). Financial barriers associated with APCs and the tendency of institutional evaluation systems to privilege established, often subscription-based journals further complicate adoption, even for authors who express strong support for OA.

More recently, a small but growing body of work has shifted from authors' publishing decisions to the needs and experiences of journal editors themselves. Hunter et al.'s "Ask the Editors" survey of faculty editors at a single institution identifies which publishing services and platform features editors value, how satisfied they are with their current publishers, and how aware they are of alternative and OA models (Hunter et al., 2022). Their results show that editors place particularly high importance on coordination of peer review, copyediting, and robust submission and peer review management systems, and that many recognize both the challenges facing academic publishing and the opportunities presented by newer, library-led models. Similar editor-focused assessments in individual library publishing programs, often based on local surveys or focus groups, report similar priorities around production support, indexing and discoverability, and clearer communication of what library publishing can offer

(Lovett & Rathemacher, 2020). Other work on the impact of publishers' commercial versus nonprofit orientation on editorial practices suggests that organizational goals and business models materially shape the support, autonomy, and expectations experienced by editorial staff (Krapež, 2023). Together, these studies underscore that editors' stated preferences and perceived needs are mediated by the structures, incentives, and resource constraints of the publishers with whom they partner.

Research gaps and study contributions

Editor-focused studies and local library publishing assessments demonstrate the utility of surveying editors about their needs and preferences, but they are typically bound to single institutions or programs and pay less attention to how publisher type, society revenue dependencies, and disciplinary OA norms shape editors' options and trade-offs. Research on editorial labor has likewise tended to concentrate on particular publisher environments rather than systematically comparing experiences across different organizational and economic contexts (Krapež, 2023).

This study contributes to filling these gaps by attempting to broaden the spectrum of editors studied. By examining how factors such as discipline, current publisher type, access model, and subscription dependencies influence editorial decision-making, this research provides actionable insights for library publishers and others seeking to develop sustainable, values-aligned partnerships. Furthermore, the study explores the often-overlooked tension between advancing OA and sustaining independent scholarly communities. Understanding when OA represents a feature versus a compromise from the editorial perspective can help stakeholders develop more effective strategies for collective action and publishing transitions that honor multiple values simultaneously, rather than assuming that OA is always the primary or uncontested goal.

METHODS

The basis of this study is a survey conducted between April 22 and May 28, 2024, supplemented by a series of follow-up interviews held between May and September 2024. The data for this study have been made openly available through the Digital Repository at the University of Maryland (DRUM) (Wilson, 2026). The survey was distributed through targeted professional networks: the Library Publishing Coalition listserv, the Council for Editors of Learned Journals (CELJ), the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), and the Society for Scholarly Publishing (SSP).

Follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 survey respondents representing diverse journal types and publishing arrangements. Interview participants included editors

from subscription-only journals published by scholarly societies, hybrid journals working with commercial publishers, and fully OA journals, and the interview data provided contextual information that helped interpret survey findings and illuminated the reasoning behind editors' stated priorities.

The survey was hosted and data were analyzed using Qualtrics software. While no AI tools were used in data collection or analysis in the drafting phase, the author utilized Claude (Sonnet 4.6), a large language model, to generate Figures 1–7 for the purposes of illustrating statistically significant findings. Only de-identified, aggregate data points were supplied to Claude, not raw response-level data or any personally identifying information. Additionally, no free-text responses, interview notes, transcriptions, or respondent identifiers were provided to any AI system. The author specified chart types and visual parameters and directed design decisions. Claude produced HTML/CSS/JavaScript code to render the figures, which were subsequently exported as PNG files. All data, analytical interpretations, and figure captions were supplied and reviewed by the author.

Sample characteristics

A total of 117 complete survey responses were collected. Respondents represented a mix of editorial roles, with most identifying as current or former editors-in-chief or editorial board members, along with smaller numbers of managing editors, associate editors, and journal founders/publishers. The distribution of respondents provided excellent diversity across key variables of interest, enabling comparative analysis across disciplines, publisher types, and access models (Figure 1).

RESULTS

Economic impacts on decision-making

Subscription and hybrid journals in this study demonstrated limited motivation to transition to OA models. Most editors of these journals indicated that OA is not prevalent in their discipline or subfield, resulting in minimal pressure from their research communities to change publishing models. Subscription and hybrid journals associated with *scholarly societies* particularly emphasized the importance of subscription revenue streams for sustaining organizational activities beyond publication.

Of the 117 respondents, 28 journals (23.9%) operated under subscription-only models. Their responses indicate that revenue is used to support a variety of society needs and activities, but

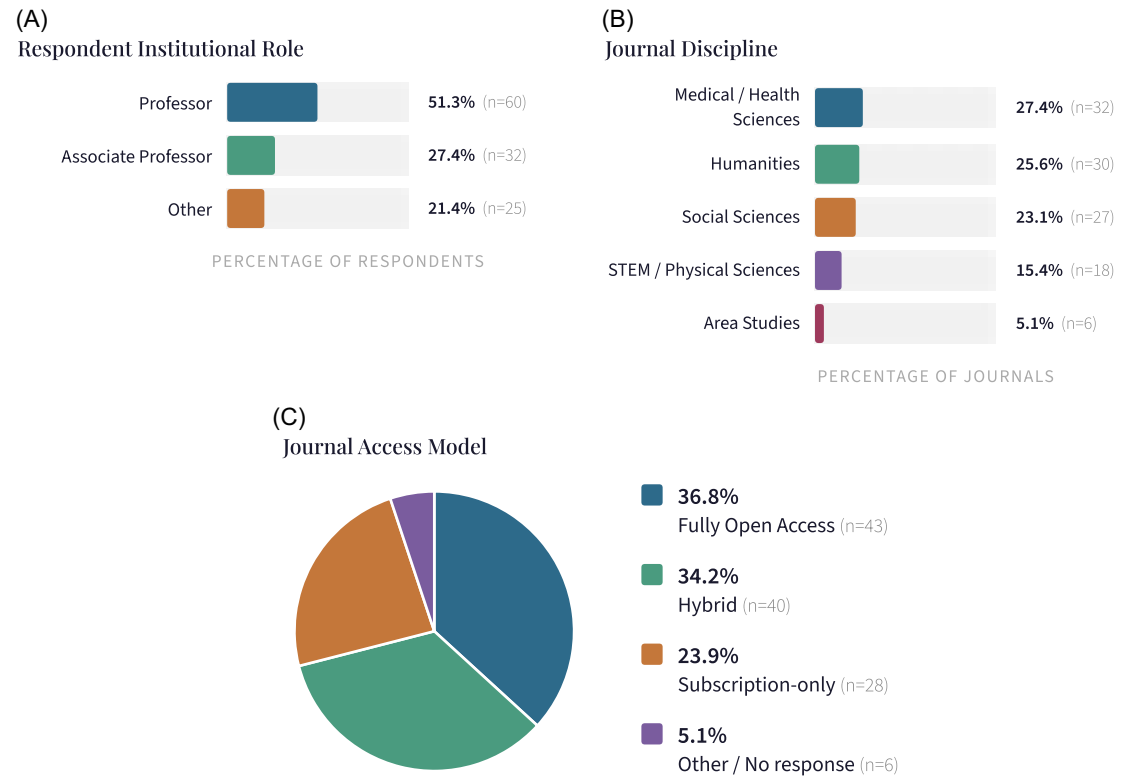

Figure 1. Survey sample characteristics. (A) Respondent institutional role (n=117). (B) Discipline of respondent's journal (n=113). (C) Journal access model (n=117). Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

that a preponderance of subscription profits is plowed directly back into journal maintenance through production costs (Figure 2).

Interview data revealed nuanced perspectives on the relationship between subscription revenue and potential partnerships with academy-owned publishers. One subscription journal editor managing both independent print subscriptions and distribution through Project Muse expressed strong interest in joining a diamond OA program, contingent on the program providing comprehensive typesetting and copyediting services, since virtually all subscription revenue currently funds production and printing. This editor indicated that while maintaining print publication was highly valued, a print-on-demand model or subsidized print service would be acceptable. Editors of hybrid and subscription-based journals interviewed for this study expressed openness to OA if it were a requirement of partnering with an academy-owned or library publisher, though this would not constitute their primary motivation for such partnerships. Instead, these editors found academy-owned publishing attractive due to perceived institutional stability and an interest in supporting community-owned infrastructure.

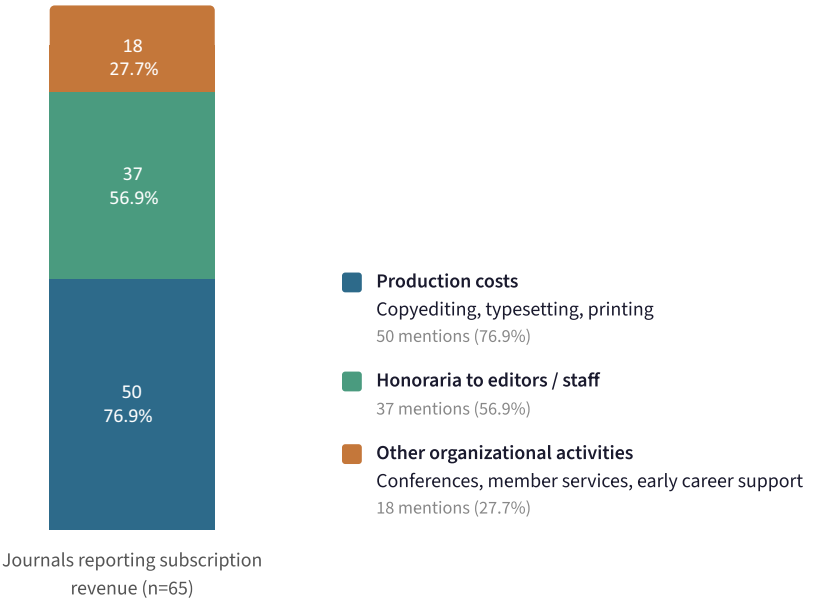

Figure 2. Use of Subscription Revenue

Critically, they emphasized that, at a minimum, any compelling partnership package must cover the production costs (typesetting, copyediting, printing) currently funded by subscription revenue.

Two interview participants - one managing a subscription journal in mathematics and another managing a hybrid journal for an independent scholarly society - provided perspectives on the relationship between subscription revenue and society sustainability. Both emphasized that subscription revenue supports not only journal publication but also conferences, member services, and early career scholar programs. The hybrid journal editor noted that subscriptions, combined with conference revenue and member contributions, proved "absolutely essential in sustaining their society" and that careful management of independent publishing was "key not only in maintaining the quality of the journal but in the persistence of the society as a valuable and autonomous body."

Both editors expressed a strong interest in university/library partnerships as opportunities to strengthen and stabilize independent scholarly work. This finding suggests that publishing partnership models supporting subscription journals might better honor the unique value of scholarly societies as vital aspects of professional academic life. Subscriptions represent one of the few revenue sources sustaining these bodies. Although interested in academy-owned publishing, the mathematics journal editor expressed a disinterest in OA, which stemmed from disciplinary norms: the field relies on methodical, attenuated peer review

processes, while preprint servers like arXiv adequately serve needs for timely access and public sharing. Since OA models are most often achieved through commercial publisher partnerships (which possess the necessary technical infrastructure), focusing less on OA as an absolute goal and more on autonomy and community ownership might better uphold ethical practice. This reframing may require greater attention to subscribe-to-open models or alternative funding partnerships to replace subscription revenue if OA remains a priority for library publishing movements.

OA prevalence and publisher choice

Survey data revealed a strong correlation between the prevalence of OA within a discipline and the importance editors placed on the publishing model when choosing publishers. This relationship likely also explains the observed correlation between OA prevalence and commercial publishing partnerships: communities in high-OA fields needed partners with technical infrastructure to support this model at scale.

The disciplinary OA environment significantly affected publisher selection priorities (Figure 3). Among journals where OA was reported as prevalent or very prevalent, 72.7% of respondents ($n = 16$ of 22 who answered this question) rated the ability to publish OA as important or very important (4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) when choosing their current publisher. For fully OA journals, respondents were substantially more likely to report that OA was prevalent or very prevalent in their discipline, confirming the relationship between collective disciplinary adoption and individual journal decisions. Among hybrid journals, importance

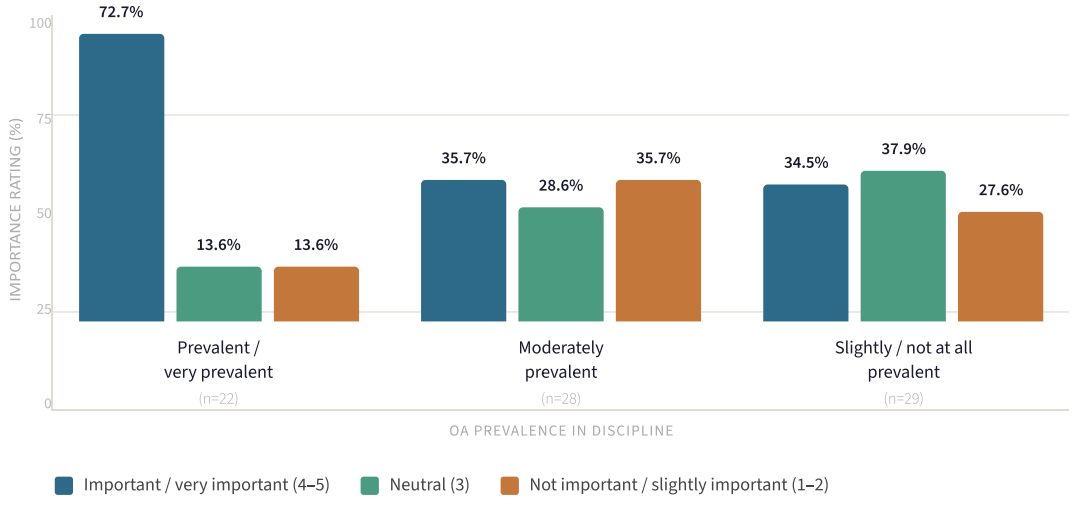

Figure 3. OA Prevalence and Its Importance in Publisher Choice.

ratings for OA capability when selecting publishers showed greater variation, reflecting mixed OA adoption levels in their fields.

These findings suggest that while individual scholars may value OA in their roles as authors, this commitment does not strongly impact editorial decision-making until OA becomes widespread practice within a discipline. Library publishers seeking to attract journals from fields with low OA prevalence may need to emphasize factors other than openness itself.

Hybrid transitions to full OA

When asked whether the ability to publish as fully OA journals would motivate them to change publishers, responses among all subscription and hybrid journals ($n = 68$) revealed substantial variation (Figure 4A). A notably modest motivation to adopt full OA contrasts sharply with responses concerning APCs. When hybrid journals charging APCs ($n = 26$) were asked if eliminating APCs would motivate publisher changes, 23.1% ($n = 6$) indicated they would be somewhat or very motivated (ratings 4–5). While this percentage may appear modest, it represents a meaningful signal that APC costs create tension even among journals that have adopted them.

Among fully OA journals ($n = 43$), just over half (53.5%, $n = 23$) charge APCs. Of these OA journals charging APCs, 73.9% ($n = 17$ of 23) rated their motivation to eliminate APCs at 4 or 5 on the 5-point scale, indicating substantial interest in diamond OA models if they could be made economically feasible (Figure 4B).

These findings demonstrate that reducing financial burdens on publishing authors represents a significant incentive for changing publishing arrangements, and they suggest that library publishers and other academy-owned publishing initiatives should emphasize diamond OA and foreground APC elimination in communications with prospective journal partners.

Publisher attributes and services

Survey respondents rated various publisher attributes on a 1–5 importance scale (1 = Not at all Important, 5 = Very Important) when selecting publishers (Figure 5).

Findings underscored that editors simultaneously value autonomy *and* robust production/technical support, a bundle of capabilities that many interviewees reported experiencing most consistently in long-standing commercial publisher relationships. The high importance placed on publisher reputation and disciplinary expertise further suggests that newer library

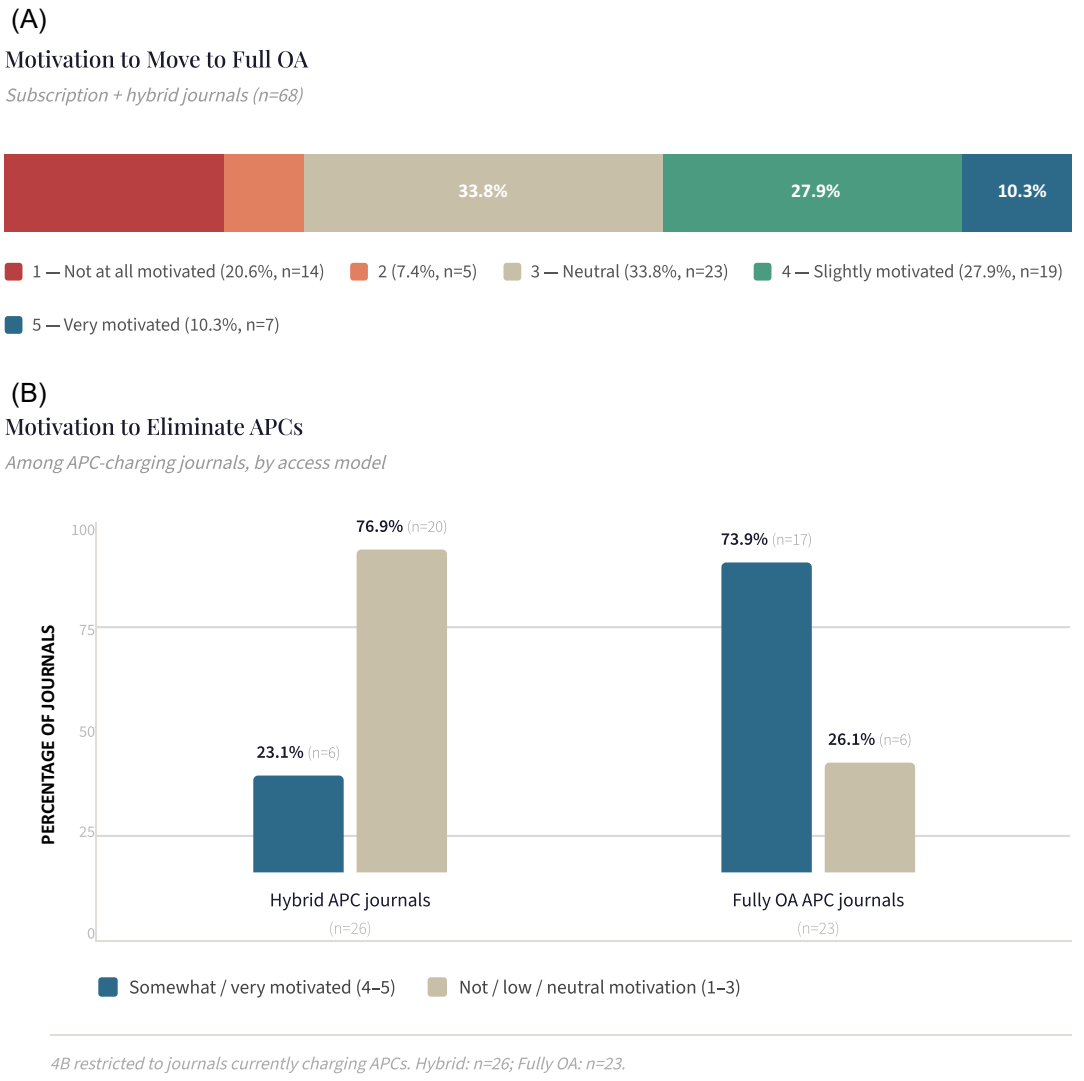

Figure 4. Motivation to Change Publisher for OA vs. APC Elimination

publishing programs face challenges in attracting journals unless they can demonstrate credibility and relevant experience.

When rating the importance of various journal policy options (1–5 scale), respondents indicated strong prioritization of copyright-related policies, reflecting further concerns about scholarly autonomy, this time with regard to intellectual property control (Figure 6).

The data here suggest that author-friendly copyright and Creative Commons options may function as genuine advantages over commercial publisher policies that typically involve

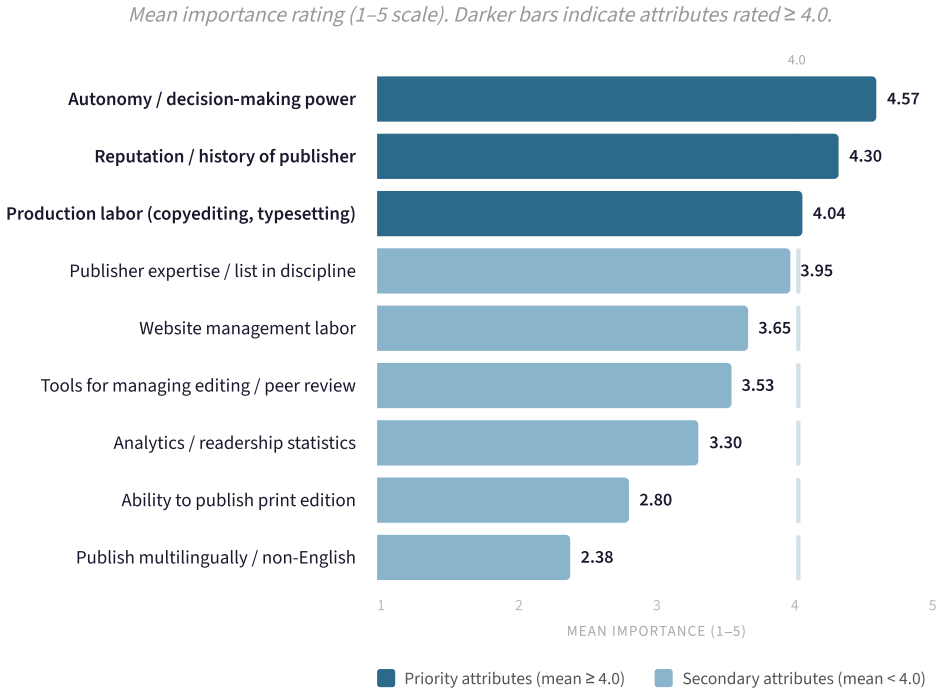

Figure 5. Importance of Publisher Attributes

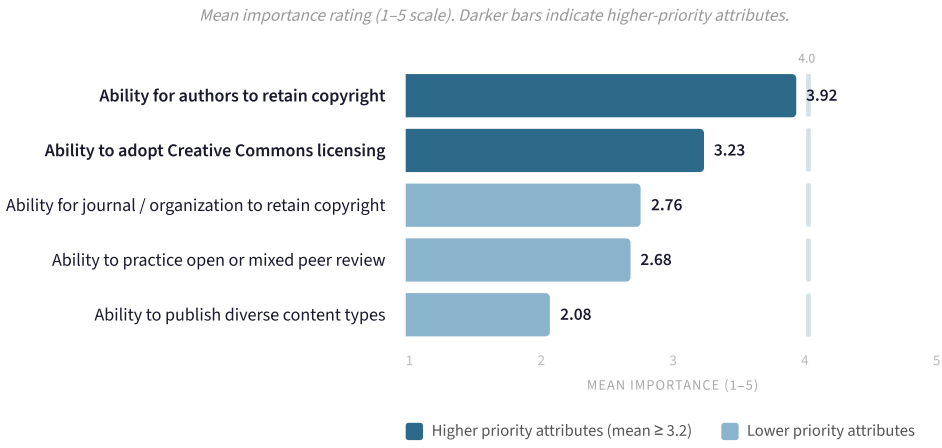

Figure 6. Importance of Journal Policy Options

copyright transfer, but respondents' emphasis on production quality, discoverability, and platform stability likely means that policies supporting author rights must be coupled with robust service delivery to be persuasive.

Willingness to compromise to change publishers

The survey presented a hypothetical scenario: "Imagine your journal is interested in moving to a new publisher to access new benefits that are compelling to your organization." Respondents rated their willingness to make various compromises on a 1–5 scale (1 = Very unwilling, 5 = Very willing), and the mean values reveal clear boundaries (Figure 7). Editors are extremely protective of journal identity and branding (title, imprimatur) and resist both adopting APCs and taking on production labor. However, they show flexibility around digital-first publishing and website management tasks.

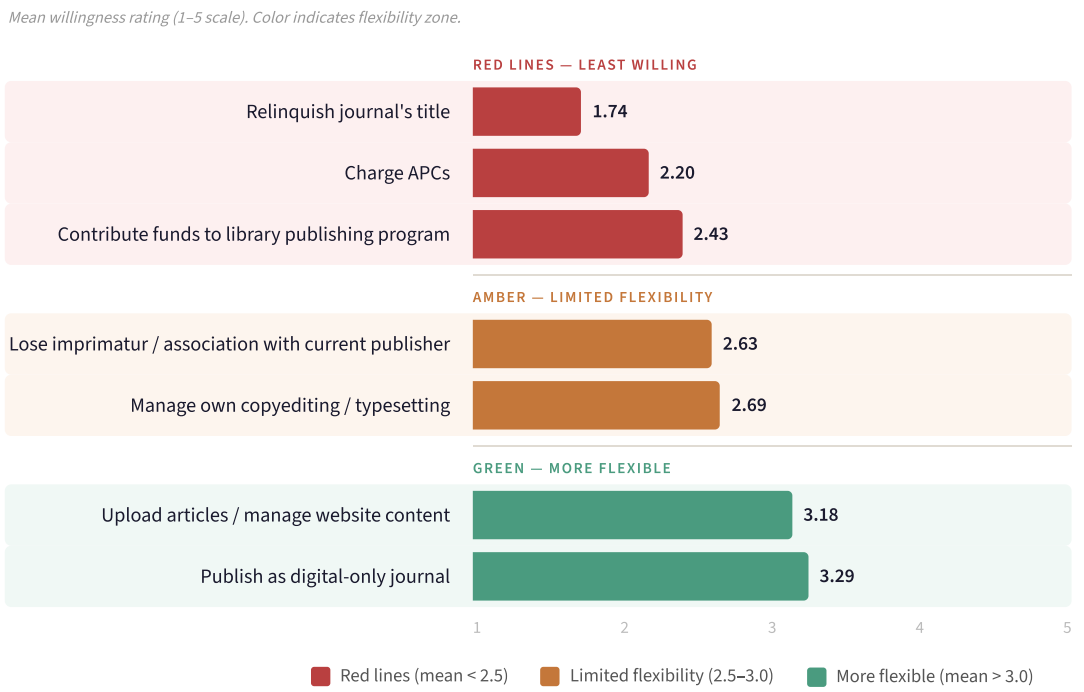

Figure 7. Willingness to Compromise to Access New Benefits

The extreme unwillingness to relinquish journal titles has some significant implications for library publishing outreach. "Flipping" journals by having editorial boards resign and start new titles under different names—a strategy sometimes employed when commercial publishers refuse to release journals—faces steep resistance. Even editors dissatisfied with current publishers prove reluctant to abandon the journal brand, citation history, and recognition associated with existing titles.

EFFECTS OF CURRENT PUBLISHER TYPE

Commercial publishers

Among respondents whose journals were published by commercial academic publishers ($n = 49$, 41.9%), most reported satisfaction with technical and production support received from these partners. Many perceived transitioning to library or independent publishing as undesirable due to anticipated additional work burdens and/or the loss of established technologies and staff support.

However, commercially published journal editors expressed concerns about financial inequities, particularly regarding APC costs and their effects on author communities. For 19 of 28 commercially published journals responding to this question, editors indicated they would be somewhat or very motivated to change publishers based solely on the ability to reduce or eliminate APCs.

For these journals, values misalignment is currently offset by service quality and transition difficulties, including the challenge of moving vast back catalogs with associated copyrights into different systems. This trade-off appears especially pronounced in fields where APC pricing has been incorporated into grant budgets and research funding structures, and where maintaining unbroken citation metrics and high impact factors is considered essential for journal success.

Survey data regarding services and compromises support this interpretation: commercially published journals value production support (4.04 mean importance) and are very unwilling to take on production labor themselves (2.69 mean willingness), while also being extremely unwilling to relinquish journal titles (1.74 mean willingness). Library publishers seeking to attract journals from commercial partners must therefore offer production quality matching or exceeding current services while finding mechanisms to preserve journal identity and back-catalog access.

University presses

University press partnerships would appear to offer a "middle ground" between commercial publishing (high service quality, but values misalignment and high costs) and fully independent publishing (high autonomy but resource constraints). Qualitative data suggest these partnerships are grounded in shared academic values and good faith collaboration. The university press model, which operates within academic institutions but with professional publishing expertise, successfully balances autonomy and support in ways that satisfy many editors.

The accounts of the two interviewees whose journals were published by university presses reinforced this picture of positive, values-aligned relationships. One humanities editor described working with their press as "attuned and supportive," emphasizing the press's flexibility with their unique needs as a humanities publication, including licensing, reproduction, and publication of visual materials and primary sources. Another editor in the physical sciences praised their press's investment in editorial board meetings, travel support, honoraria, and promotional work, and credited this high-touch handling with "holding the journal together," while also noting that the press allows the sponsoring society "quite a bit of independence" that they doubted a different publisher would grant.

Independent and society-owned journals

Editors working independently or through scholarly society publishing arrangements expressed interest in partnering with library or academy-owned publishers. They described feeling burdened by the challenges of maintaining journal operations in an increasingly complex and competitive publishing environment.

Two key themes emerged from these respondents:

1. Fear about autonomy loss or stability disruption: While interested in partnerships, these editors worried that joining a library publishing program might result in lost decision-making control or that changes could destabilize currently functional (if challenging) operations.
2. Reluctance to abandon subscription models: These editors often did not perceive sufficient value in OA to offset subscription revenue loss, particularly when OA was not prevalent in their disciplines and when subscription income supported broader society activities.

These journals likely represent the most promising prospects for academy-owned publishing partnerships, provided such partnerships can offer comprehensive production support and revenue alternatives or cost reductions that offset subscription loss. The emphasis on stability and long-term commitment is particularly important. One humanities editor expressed deep skepticism about shifting to a library-based publisher, citing volatile budgets, changing leadership, and worries about whether such arrangements truly offer stability or long-term stewardship. At the same time, other editors voiced strong conditional enthusiasm for academy-owned partnerships, imagining models with very low APCs or subscribe-to-open funding, graduate students assisting with day-to-day work, and libraries and university presses "partnering together" around open knowledge and knowledge sharing. Indeed, partnership models

that transcend individual institutions - such as consortial or network-based approaches - might address these concerns more effectively than single-institution programs.

DISCUSSION

OA and economic incentives

The data in this study clearly demonstrate that subscription revenue dependencies create substantial barriers to OA transitions, often overriding editors' personal values regarding open knowledge. The practical implication is that library publishers must either provide alternative revenue sources that replace subscription income or offer service packages (particularly production services) at costs low enough that remaining society revenues can cover lost subscription income while maintaining other programs. Appeals to OA principles, while potentially resonating with editors' values, are insufficient to motivate changes in the face of economic realities.

The strong correlation between disciplinary OA prevalence and the importance editors place on OA capability when selecting publishers suggests that collective adoption within fields drives publishing model choices more powerfully than individual editor commitments. This finding extends research on author publishing decisions by demonstrating that "values versus pragmatism" tension operates differently at the editorial or organizational level than at the individual researcher level. Disciplines where OA has achieved critical mass create environments where editors feel pressure from author communities and peer journals to offer OA options, making the capability to support this model important in publisher selection. Conversely, in fields where OA remains uncommon, editors face little pressure to adopt OA and may prioritize other publisher attributes.

This suggests that perhaps advocates for OA or change to publishing norms should target disciplinary communities collectively rather than approaching journals individually. Supporting the development of discipline-specific OA norms through partnerships with scholarly societies, discipline-based funder mandates, and showcasing successful OA journals within fields may prove more effective than journal-by-journal recruitment.

Across both hybrid and fully OA journals, the ability to reduce or eliminate costs to authors emerged as one of the few factors strong enough to motivate publisher changes. This finding corroborates recent research identifying financial barriers as the most significant obstacle to OA publishing (Kaliuzhna et al., 2025) and extends it to the editorial decision-making context. Library publishers offering diamond OA models possess a genuine competitive advantage, provided they can deliver this sustainably while maintaining service quality.

Balancing autonomy and support

The high importance ratings for both editorial autonomy (4.57 mean) and production support (4.04 mean) reveal a central conflict: editors want control over their publications while also needing sophisticated technical infrastructure and production services. This finding illuminates why library publishing programs, despite aligning with editor values regarding openness and community ownership, struggle to attract journals. Newer programs often cannot match commercial publishers' production infrastructure, platform sophistication, and technical support while simultaneously offering the autonomy and shared governance that distinguish them from commercial models. The implication is that library publishers must invest substantially in production capabilities and technical infrastructure, as partnerships that provide autonomy but insufficient support prove unattractive.

Collective action opportunities

Several findings point toward opportunities for collective action that could strengthen library publishing's competitive position. Editor concerns about sustainability when partnerships depend on single institutions or administrators suggest that consortial or multi-institutional models may provide greater reassurance. Regional, disciplinary, or mission-based library publishing consortia could offer stability advantages while pooling resources for infrastructure investment.

Rather than each library- or community-based publishing program offering identical services, a collaborative division of labor by discipline or service type could create more sophisticated, sustainable offerings. For example, programs might specialize in particular disciplinary areas (developing deep expertise in field-specific indexing, metadata standards, and community needs) or in particular services (XML production, multimedia hosting, complex typesetting), with journals accessing specialized services through network partnerships rather than requiring comprehensive capabilities from each institution.

The study found that journals place a high value on maintaining identity and access to their content catalogs and metrical histories. However, the difficulty of moving journals, including back catalog migration, metadata transfer, copyright management, and indexing continuity, emerged as a major barrier to publisher changes. Collective investment in shared transition infrastructure and expertise would benefit the entire library publishing community. This might include shared technical protocols and tools for content migration, as well as legal template agreements for journal transfers. Many barriers to journal mobility stem from publisher contract terms that grant commercial publishers extensive rights over journal titles, content, and identity. Collective advocacy for contract standards in scholarly communications could

establish norms for journal title ownership, content transfer rights, and contract termination procedures that facilitate competition and reduce lock-in.

At the same time, collective funding and governance arrangements face well-documented obstacles, including coordination costs, uneven institutional budgets, divergent priorities among participating organizations, and the complexity of designing decision-making structures that societies and libraries alike perceive as fair and durable. OA collective action activities succeed when they align financial and governance arrangements with the specific kinds of stability and autonomy that editors in this study said they needed in order to contemplate changing publishers.

Editors repeatedly emphasized that any move away from established commercial publishers would only be viable if alternative partners could guarantee at least equivalent production and technical support. Consortial and library-based models that centralize infrastructure respond directly to this concern. The Open Library of Humanities operates a diamond OA platform funded by a worldwide consortium of libraries that pay modest annual fees, using this shared pool to underwrite publishing costs and platform development rather than charging APCs, while participating journals retain their titles and editorial control (Eve et al., 2020). In Canada, Érudit's partnership with Coalition Publica similarly channels multi-library support to a not-for-profit platform that provides hosting and services for humanities and social science journals as they move toward OA (Coalition Publica, n.d.).

Beyond infrastructure, a variety of collective funding models seek to replace or supplement journal-level revenues. Programs such as the Lyrasis Open Access Community Investment Program (OACIP) provide a structured mechanism for libraries and other stakeholders to jointly assess and fund diamond OA journals, explicitly covering labor and infrastructure costs rather than one-off APCs (Lyrasis, n.d.). Disciplinary and regional initiatives like Germany's KOALA Consortium enable libraries to cooperatively finance APC-free journals in fields such as computer science and mathematics, while Libraria has experimented with cooperative and subscribe-to-open arrangements to support anthropology and related disciplines (KOALA, n.d.; Corsín Jiménez, 2019).

Taken together, these models illustrate how collective approaches can be designed to offload production labor onto shared infrastructures, provide more predictable streams of support in place of individual journal subscriptions or APC revenue, and formalize protections for journal identity and editorial governance—precisely the conditions under which editors in this study indicated they would seriously consider shifting away from commercial publishers.

CONCLUSION

The initial purpose of this study was to deepen understanding of journal editors' practical concerns to help academy-owned and library publishers develop service models better aligned with actual needs. The findings reveal a complex landscape where values-based commitments to OA exist in persistent friction with economic dependencies, disciplinary norms, and pragmatic concerns about service quality and journal sustainability.

In addition to these findings, analysis of the data and conversation with interview subjects led to a critical reflection on the relationship between OA advocacy and scholarly community sustainability. In the pursuit of a more open knowledge ecosystem, we might be inadvertently creating conditions that are less sustainable for independent publishing communities. To what extent, in valuing OA above other concerns, are we working at cross purposes with the value of vibrant, autonomous scholarly communities of practice?

If our goal as library partners or OA advocates is to bring more communities into the OA movement, we must recognize that, for many communities, adopting OA represents a compromise rather than an automatic improvement. Research on sustainable OA transitions emphasizes that forcing rapid OA adoption without addressing economic realities and community needs may actually undermine the scholarly societies and independent publishers that represent alternatives to commercial consolidation.

Perhaps if we focus less on OA as the primary goal and more on autonomy, sustainability, and ongoing connections to scholarly societies and other community-owned bodies, we would actually better uphold ethical practice in scholarly communication? This reframing does not abandon OA as a value; rather, it recognizes that the path to OA must honor the intermediate steps required for community sustainability. Supporting subscribe-to-open models, providing comprehensive production services that replace subscription-funded activities, and accepting that some journals may maintain subscription models while partnering with academy-owned publishers all represent pragmatic approaches that preserve scholarly communities while building alternative infrastructures.

Library publishers and academy-owned publishing initiatives possess genuine advantages: alignment with academic values, nonprofit governance, emphasis on community ownership, and commitments to sustainable knowledge systems. However, realizing these advantages requires matching commercial publishers on service quality and production capabilities while simultaneously differentiating on governance, transparency, and editorial autonomy. It requires building trust with scholarly societies and independent journals through demonstrated stability and long-term commitment. And it requires recognizing

that transformation of deeply entrenched publishing systems happens through accumulated partnerships and evolving norms, not through rapid sea change. By honoring this complexity and building partnerships grounded in mutual understanding of needs and constraints, academy-owned publishing can offer genuine alternatives to commercial actors while strengthening the scholarly communities that make knowledge creation possible.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank Jeremiah Mercurio and Melanie Schlosser for their support and advice in designing the survey instrument for this study.

REFERENCES

Borrego, Á. (2023). Article processing charges for open access journal publishing: A review. *Learned Publishing*, 36. https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1558

Coalition Publica. (n.d.). *Coalition publica*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from https://www.coalition-publi.ca/

Corsín Jiménez, A. (2019, October 21). *Cooperate for open*. Libraria. https://libraria.cc/program-areas/cooperate-for-open/

Dyson, H. J., Hall, K. B., & Piston, D. W. (2019). Economics and politics of publishing in our mission-driven society. *Biophysical Journal*, *116*(10), E1–E2. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bpj.2019.04.019

Eve, M. P., Vega, P. C., & Edwards, C. (2020). Lessons from the open library of humanities. *LIBER Quarterly: The Journal of the Association of European Research Libraries*, *30*(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.18352/lq.10327

Johnson, R. & Greaves, S. (July 30 2025). *Guest post - society publishers at a crossroads: new evidence of an accelerating crisis*. The Scholarly Kitchen. https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2025/07/30/guest-post-society-publishers-at-a-crossroads-new-evidence-of-an-accelerating-crisis/

Hunter, M. E., Dunne, L., Thomas, C., Miller, L., & Soper, D. (2022). Ask the editors: Assessing the publishing needs of faculty editors. *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*, *10*(1). https://doi.org/10.31274/jlsc.12912

Kaliuzhna, N., Aydin, Z., Müller, P., & Hauschke, C. (2025). Hurdles to open access publishing faced by authors: A scoping literature review from 2004 to 2023. *Royal Society Open Science*, *12*(8). https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.250257

KOALA Consortium. (n.d.). Leibniz Information Centre for Science and Technology. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from https://www.tib.eu/en/services/koala

Krapež, K. (2023). Impact of publisher's commercial or non-profit orientation on editorial practices: Moving towards a more strategic approach to supporting editorial staff. *Learned Publishing*, *36*(4), 543–553. https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1575

Lovett, J., & Rathemacher, A. (2020). What do editors want?: Assessing a growing library publishing program and finding creative solutions to unmet needs. In *Charleston Library Conference: Library Services*. Purdue University Press. https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/charleston/2019/libraryservices/3

Lyrasis. (n.d.). *Open Access Community Investment Program*. Retrieved April 13, 2026, from https://lyrasis.org/oacip/

McCready, K., & Molls, E. (2018). Developing a business plan for a library publishing program. *Publications*, *6*(4), 42. https://doi.org/10.3390/publications6040042

Molls, E. (2022). Publishing scholarly societies: one library's approach. *The Serials Librarian*, *82*(1–4), 194–198. https://doi.org/10.1080/0361526X.2022.2028505

Montgomery, L., Bell, E. C., Huang, K., & Conversation, T. (March 25, 2025). Academic publishing is a multibillion-dollar industry. It's not always good for science. Retrieved February 02, 2026, from https://phys.org/news/2025-03-academic-publishing-multibillion-dollar-industry.html

Nelson, A. (2022). Ensuring free, immediate, and equitable access to federally funded research. White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/08-2022-OSTP-Public-Access-Memo.pdf

Niles, M. T., Schimanski, L. A., McKiernan, E. C., & Alperin, J. P. (2020). Why we publish where we do: Faculty publishing values and their relationship to review, promotion and tenure expectations. *PLOS ONE*, *15*(3), e0228914. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0228914

Plan S. (n.d.). cOAlition S confirms the end of its financial support for Open Access publishing under transformative arrangements after 2024. https://www.coalition-s.org/coalition-s-confirms-the-end-of-its-financial-support-for-open-access-publishing-under-transformative-arrangements-after-2024

Rationale for the Revisions Made to the Plan S Principles and Implementation Guidance | Plan S. (n.d.). Retrieved February 27, 2026, from https://www.coalition-s.org/rationale-for-the-revisions/

Ross-Hellauer, T., Reichmann, S., Cole, N., Fessl, A., Klebel, T., & Pontika, N. (2021). Dynamics of cumulative advantage and threats to equity in open science: A scoping review. *Royal Society Open Science*, 9. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.211032

Shopovski, J., & Marolov, D. (2017). Why academics choose to publish in a mega-journal. *Journal of Education and Learning*, *6*(4), 348–353. https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v6n4p348

Tenopir, C., Dalton, E., Fish, A., Christian, L., Jones, M., & Smith, M. (2016). What motivates authors of scholarly articles? The importance of journal attributes and potential audience on publication choice. *Publications*, *4*(3), 22. https://doi.org/10.3390/publications4030022

UNESCO. (n.d.) *Diamond open access*. Retrieved May 21, 2026, from https://www.unesco.org/en/diamond-open-access

Willinsky, J. (2006). Scholarly associations and the economic viability of open access publishing. *Journal of Digital Information*, *4*(2). https://jodi-ojs-tdl.tdl.org/jodi/article/view/jodi-117

Wilson, M. (2026). *Dataset - Journal editors publishing needs*. Digital Repository at the University of Maryland (DRUM). doi.https://doi.org/org/10.13016/bg9q-et5k

Wise, A., & Estelle, L. (2020). How society publishers can accelerate their transition to open access and align with Plan S. *Learned Publishing*, *33*(1), 14–27. https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1272

APPENDIX: SURVEY INSTRUMENT AND STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Survey Instrument: Understanding scholarly journals' publisher needs

Welcome. The purpose of this study is to identify aspects of open access and scholarly-led publishing that appeal to the practicing academic community and to assess what concerns arise as journal titles consider moving away from conventional publishing houses and subscription models. The information gathered will be analyzed to better understand how publishers can support editorial boards and scholarly societies in today's digital publishing ecosystem. For library and other community-owned publishers, this information may help to strengthen and tailor service models to align with the philosophical, financial, and technical transitions that would support transitions away from existing commercial publishers.

Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

This is a confidential and anonymous survey unless you choose to identify yourself as a potential interview subject. At the end of the survey, you will be given the opportunity to participate in a follow up interview study. If you would like to be considered for an interview, we will ask for your name, institutional email address, and the journal(s) you are affiliated with. Your personal information will not be linked to your survey responses.

Thank you for participating in this survey.

_____

Q1. Which of the following best describes your home institution:

- Doctoral university
- Master's college or university
- Baccalaureate college

Q2. Into which of the following age bands do you fall:

- 18–21
- 22–34
- 35–44

- 45–54
- 55–64
- 65 and over
- Prefer not to answer

Q3. Which of the following best describes your title or role at your institution: (select one)

- Professor
- Associate Professor
- Assistant Professor
- Adjunct Professor
- Lecturer
- Instructor
- Student
- Researcher
- Other _____

****If the answer is Professor, Associate Professor, or Assistant Professor display this question:*

Q3a. What is your tenure status?

- Tenured
- Tenure-track
- Non-tenure-track

Q4. Which of the following best describes your involvement with a scholarly journal:

- I am the editor in chief of a journal
- I currently serve on the editorial board of a journal
- I do not currently serve on an editorial board or as an editor in chief but have done so previously

- I have not worked on a journal as an editor or staff member, but I hold a leadership position in a scholarly society or other organization that owns or publishes an academic journal
- Other_____

Q5. Which of these best describes the discipline of your Journal? (drop down)

- Area Studies
- Humanities
- Sciences
- Social Sciences
- Medicine

Q6. Which of the following best describes the publisher of your journal?

- Commercial Academic Publisher
- University Press
- Library publisher
- Independent/Self-Hosted
- Other _____

Q7. Is your journal published online or in print?

- Online
- Print
- Both online and print

Q8. How would you define the publishing model of the journal you are affiliated with? (drop down)

- Subscription-only (readers must pay for a subscription or pay to access individual articles)
- Hybrid (some articles are free to read while others are only available to subscribers or if paid for individually)

- Open Access (distributed online, free of cost or other access barriers)

Conditional - If they select either subscription or hybrid is selected in the previous question

Q8a. How is subscription revenue utilized by your organization? (Please select all that apply)

- Revenue pays for our journal production and/or distribution costs
- Revenue provides stipends or benefits for journal editors and staff
- Revenue to supports other programs or activities of your organization

Conditional - If they either hybrid or open access is selected in the previous question

Q8b. Does your journal charge APCs (article processing charges) or otherwise bill authors to publish their work open access?

- Yes
- No

***Conditional - If YES is selected in the question "Does your journal charge APCs (article processing charges) or otherwise bill authors to publish their work open access?"*

Q8c. To what extent would being able to reduce or eliminate costs to authors (such as article processing charges (APCs)) motivate you to change your publisher?

1. Not at all motivated
2. Slightly motivated
3. Neutral
4. Somewhat motivated
5. Very motivated

Q9. What is the purpose(s) of your journal or publishing program: (Please select all that apply)

- To disseminate scholarship in your field

- To provide a publishing venue for established members of the field
- To provide a publishing venue for emerging voices in your field
- To publish conference proceedings or other records of organizational activities
- To generate revenue to support other programs or activities of your organization
- To provide a benefit to members

Q10. To what extent are Open Access journals prevalent in your discipline?

1. Not at all prevalent
2. Slightly prevalent
3. Moderately prevalent
4. Prevalent
5. Very prevalent

Conditional

If response to question about pub model (How would you define the publishing model of the journal you are affiliated with?) was subscription or hybrid:

Q10a. To what extent would being able to publish a fully open access journal motivate you to change your publisher?

1. Not at all motivated
2. Slightly motivated
3. Neutral
4. Somewhat motivated
5. Very motivated

If response to question about pub model (How would you define the publishing model of the journal you are affiliated with?) was OA or hybrid:

Q10b. When choosing your current publisher, how important was being able to publish your journal open access?

1. Not at all important

2. Slightly important
3. Moderately important
4. Important
5. Very Important

Questions 11-13 present a matrix with a likert scale of 1-5. Respondents are asked to use to reflect the releative importance or willingness.

Q11. Publisher Attributes: on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is Not at all Important and 5 is Very Important, please indicate how important the following aspects were/are to your organization when selecting a publisher

The degree of autonomy and decision-making power the editorial board and/or society will have while working with the publisher.

The reputation or history of the publisher

Publisher expertise or an existing list of titles in your journal's discipline

The ability to publish multilingually or in a language other than English

The ability to publish a print edition of the journal

The ability of the publisher to provide labor to manage the journal website

The ability of the publisher provide labor to manage production tasks (copyediting, proofreading, typesetting)

The types of tools that are provided by the publisher for managing editing and peer review.

Access to analytics and readership statistics

Q12. Journal Policies: on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is Not at all Important and 5 is Very Important, please indicate how important the ability to make the following decisions regarding your journal's practice are to your organization:

The ability to allow authors to retain copyright ownership of their works.

The ability of the journal or organization as an entity to retain copyright ownership of published works

The ability to adopt a creative commons license for the journal.

The ability to practice open peer review or a mix of open and blind review.

The ability to publish other kinds of writing and resources (ie. Syllabi/Open Educational Resources, blog posts, multimedia content) alongside journal articles

Q13. Imagine your journal is interested in moving to a new publisher in order to access new benefits that are compelling to your organization. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is Very Unwilling and 5 Very Willing, how would your journal respond if asked to make the following compromises?:

Relinquish your journal's title. (Such as to re-form your community under a new journal name)

Lose the imprimatur of or association with your current publisher.

Publish as a digital-only journal.

Manage your journal's own copyediting or typesetting work

Upload of articles and manage other content (such as submission guidelines and mastheads) on the journal's website.

Charge article processing charges (APCs) or otherwise bill authors to cover the cost of journal production services.

Contribute funds from your own organization toward a library publishing program

Non-negotiable

Interest in interviews

If you are interested in talking further about open access and/or library publishing we would be delighted to learn more about your journal and its community. We invite you to share your contact information below to participate in a follow-up interview study.

* Full Name:
* Institutional email address:
* Which journal(s) are you affiliated with?:

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

A. Tell us about your journal….

What discipline(s) does it cover and what kinds of works do you publish?

Why does your organization publish a journal?

What kind of publishing model does your journal use?

(If your journal is subscription) Does your journal offer individual subscriptions? Do you offer institutional licenses? What kind of institutional subscriptions do you offer (eg. subscription, tiered subscription, subscribe-to-open)

How is your journal administered and staffed?

Who has the decision making power in your organization with regard to your publisher and publishing model?

B. Decision making factors

What do you wish you could change about your current publishing model?

Do you feel well supported by your current publisher? Do you feel as though your values and priorities align with their practices?

Are you provided with the services and or tools you need to publish your journal?

Which factor(s) or service(s) would most motivate you to change your publisher?

What do you imagine would be your greatest challenge if you shifted to a new publisher?

C. Library Publishers

If offered the opportunity to publish with an academic library publisher, would your organization be interested? Why or why not?

Is open access, publishing through community-owned spaces or technologies, or some other ethical component of the library publishing ethos appealing to you? Would the opportunity to focus on ethical practice and enact values through publishing motivate you to choose a library publisher?

What fears or concerns do you have about working with a library publisher?