

# Introducing the Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Communications (C4DISC)

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## Overview of the Initiative

Publishing professionals who bring different perspectives and have diverse life experiences and backgrounds are better equipped to solving the issues facing the publishing community. However, ethnic diversity is notably lacking in this global community and gender inequality across leadership levels is widespread. It is important to change the mindset of ingrained patterns of exclusion and inequities that exist throughout the industry and commit to attracting people into our community from diverse backgrounds, not only from ethnic and gender groups, but also other identity groups (Table 1). The Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Communications (C4DISC) was founded to address issues of diversity and inclusion in the scholarly community including:

- Eliminating barriers to participation, extending equitable opportunities across all stakeholders, and ensuring that our practices and policies promote equitable treatment and do not allow, condone, or result in discrimination;
- Creating and maintaining an environment that respects diverse traditions, heritages, and experiences;
- Promoting diversity in all staff, volunteers, and audiences, including full participation in programs, policy formulation, and decision-making;
- Raising awareness about career opportunities in our industries to groups who are currently underrepresented in the workforce; and
- Supporting our members in achieving diversity and inclusion within their organizations.<sup>1</sup>

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Table 1. Identity groups listed on the C4DISC website.

Ability/disability
Age
Appearance
Citizenship status
Ethnicity
Gender and gender identity
Geographic location
Military/veteran status
Nationality/national origin
Political beliefs
Pregnancy/parental status
Professional career level
Race/color
Religion/value system
Sexual orientation
Socioeconomic background/social class

## The Formation of C4DISC

In the past few years, attendees to the Council of Science Editor (CSE) annual meeting have had an option to attend a concurrent session on diversity in the scholarly publishing community. A number of other societies have had similar sessions in their annual meetings. In June of 2017, during the Society for Scholarly Publishing (SSP) meeting in Boston, Melanie Dolechek, Executive Director of SSP, organized a cross-organizational meeting to discuss forming a coalition (subsequently named The Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Communications or C4DISC) with a goal of increasing diversity and inclusion in our organizations (Table 2). The group discussed issuing a statement of principles<sup>1</sup> along with making plans for providing resources on best practices and establishing

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**Table 2.** C4DISC term definitions.

Term	Definition
Diversity	The composition of a group of people from any number of demographic backgrounds, identities (innate and selected), the collective strength of their experiences, beliefs, values, skills, and perspectives; and, the historical and ongoing ways in which these groups have been affected by structures of power. The variability in a diverse group is apparent in the characteristics we see and hear as well as through behaviors and expressions that we encounter and experience in our workplaces and organizations. Diverse organizations are not by default inclusive.
Inclusion	The act of establishing philosophies, policies, practices, and procedures to ensure equitable access to opportunities and resources to support individuals in contributing to the organization's success. Through encouraging awareness of power structures, creating opportunities for those who have historically been excluded, and attempting to decenter majority culture, inclusion creates infrastructure for allowing the diversity within organizations to exist and thrive in a manner that can enhance innovation and problem solving. Inclusive organizations are by definition committed to achieving diversity at all levels.

outreach programs and events around the topic of diversity.

The group representatives met by conference calls throughout the remainder of 2017 and in 2018 and in October of 2018 launched a new website<sup>2</sup> and issued a joint Statement of Principles.<sup>1</sup> The 10 founding associations include SSP, CSE, the Association of University Presses, the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers, the Canadian Association of Learned Journals, the Library Publishing Coalition, the International Society for Managing and Technical Editors, NASIG (formerly the North American Serials Interest Group), the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association, and the United Kingdom Serials Group (UKSG).

Consensus was reached after discussion among the group and each representative procuring approval from the appropriate governing group at their organizations.

### How C4DISC Can Serve the Scholarly Publishing Community

Like academic institutions more broadly, scholarly publishing is marked by the underrepresentation of minoritized populations, including but not limited to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC); women and nonbinary people; people from LGBTQ+ communities; people with disabilities; people from the global south; and people from less socioeconomically privileged classes.<sup>3</sup> These categories are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, but they give a sense of the various social and cultural factors that have historically contributed to inequity of access to publishing opportunities, recognition of scholarly merit, and prospects for leadership roles in the mobilization of knowledge.

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It is difficult to know how to address a problem this deep-seated and structural. Since inequity in scholarly publishing derives more from pervasive forms of unconscious bias than from overt bigotry, two challenges present themselves immediately. On one hand, many people—particularly those whose personal experience has been characterized by social privilege based on race, class, gender, sexuality, able-bodiedness, and/or geography—may struggle to recognize the problem at all, or to appreciate its extent. On the other hand, those who do perceive patterns of inequity may struggle to identify the source of the problem if it is not an overt form of personally held prejudice against a particular social group. Misogyny, for example, can flourish in a system even when none of the people participating in it are “misogynists.” Structural sexism thrives undercover in other forms of value judgment. For example, as the University of Arizona Commission on the Status of Women has recently pointed out, studies have shown that letters of reference written for students fall into gendered rhetorical patterns that reproduce disproportionate numbers of male students being promoted as the “stronger” candidates: Letters for men tend to be longer than those for women; letters for men emphasize accomplishment while those for women emphasize effort; and letters for men are more likely to mention research and publications, while those for women are more likely to mention personal life.<sup>4</sup> When such gendered patterns of description go unexamined, even letters that are full of praise for women candidates can contribute to perpetuating the myth that men are simply better at academic work than women are.

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Patterns of marginalization and inequity generated by implicit social bias are the result of a snowball effect over time and across different areas of the profession. A disproportionately low number of articles being published by scholars of color in a particular field, for example, might be traced to the disproportionately low numbers of people of color hired as professors in the field or granted research funds, figures that result in disproportionately low numbers of scholars of color available as editors, peer reviewers, and mentors to encourage more students of color to enter the field and profession. The problem is not simply one of numbers, but of the support systems that such numbers indicate. In order to address patterns of structural racism in scholarly publishing, it is therefore inadequate simply to try to recruit more work by BIPOC researchers; we must simultaneously work toward diversifying our pools of editors and reviewers, and to think rigorously about how the publishing process is connected to broader structures of knowledge production. Excellence is a product of support. We must ask: What forms of support have created the best and most widely recognized scholarship? Whose scholarship is receiving a healthy and effective amount of such support at every stage? And how can we better support the contributions of scholars from historically unsupported populations?

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C4DISC proceeds from the understanding that, on the whole, those working in scholarly publishing take these questions seriously and want to address them effectively. No individual person, editor, or publisher could possibly take on this problem alone; we must approach it together. As a coalition, C4DISC offers publishers a structure and a community for thinking through questions of diversity and equity with others who are doing the same. Individual journals and organizations will have questions and

challenges particular to their situations, but even the most local issues remain connected to broader patterns and deeper problems. The C4DISC Statement of Principles lays out a helpful vocabulary for considering how scholarly publications and organizations can assess and increase diversity and equal opportunity at various levels of their operations. It also articulates the commitments and goals we share in common as scholars and publishers working toward equity and inclusivity. By joining the network of organizations that have adopted the C4DISC endeavor, scholarly publishers are able to draw on a consolidated pool of emerging data about diversity in the profession, ideas about how to assess and redress existing inequities, and mutual support in our collective efforts toward a more equitable future.

The C4DISC invites other organizations to adopt the Joint Statement of Principles at the C4DISC website<sup>5</sup> to show support for making our community more diverse, equal, and inclusive. In the future, C4DISC plans to do an international market research study about diversity and inclusion in scholarly publishing.

### Links

1. <https://c4disc.org/principles/>
2. <https://c4disc.org/>
3. See, for example, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1130771>; <https://crln.acrl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/9446/10680>; <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/world-view/addressing-crisis-academic-publishing>; <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20180913095151857>; <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2017/11/16/diversity-scholarly-communications/>; <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2017/12/12/tackling-diversity-scholarly-communications-part-2/>; and <https://blog.scholasticahq.com/post/ways-academic-journals-can-increase-diversity-peer-review/>. The issue was recently discussed at Duke University's Franklin Humanities Institute event on diversity in scholarly publishing: <https://gradschool.duke.edu/professional-development/blog/future-scholarly-publishing-diversity-and-inclusion>.
4. [https://csw.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/avoiding\\_gender\\_bias\\_in\\_letter\\_of\\_reference\\_writing.pdf](https://csw.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/avoiding_gender_bias_in_letter_of_reference_writing.pdf)
5. <https://c4disc.org/participate/>