

The Forgotten Open Access Challenge: What Happened to the Author Experience?

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Publishers face multiple challenges due to the growth of Open Access publishing, and no one masters them all. Knowing how to prioritize these challenges and choosing the right approach and strategy to address them is not easy. Somehow, many still make the bold claim that they have it under control and forget that they placed the burden on the authors: paying publishing fees, ensuring everything is compliant with their funder's and institution's policies, and manually reporting data back in all directions. At ChronosHub,¹ we embrace the complexities and believe in a collaborative approach to streamline the workflow. But what have we learned from working with publishers, institutions, funders, and directly with the authors?

In order to make new research discoveries more accessible and to accelerate the research process, funders are increasingly adopting Open Access (OA) publishing policies for their funded research. Plan S will soon become a reality for many researchers, institutions, and publishers, and Open Science is quickly shaping academic publishing's digital future by changing the current practices. To put it simply, the industry calls for clear communication of high-level information to everyone involved in the research publishing process.

Authors and editors are overwhelmed by funder requirements, while funders have a hard time enforcing their policies and track the output of funding. At the same time, institutions struggle with the cost of OA, and publishers are looking for a streamlined workflow. How do we all take the first step to support researchers in the right direction, and how do we simplify these operational complexities so policies live up to their promises?

At ChronosHub, an online OA management platform, we work with all types of stakeholders daily, including Plan S funders like the Luxembourg National Research Fund

and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, publishers like Bentham Science and Emerald Publishing, and institutions like the University of Copenhagen and the National Library Consortium in Luxembourg. We see the challenges from different perspectives and have gathered some lessons learned through these collaborations, and we want to share a few examples of how we have put them into practice.

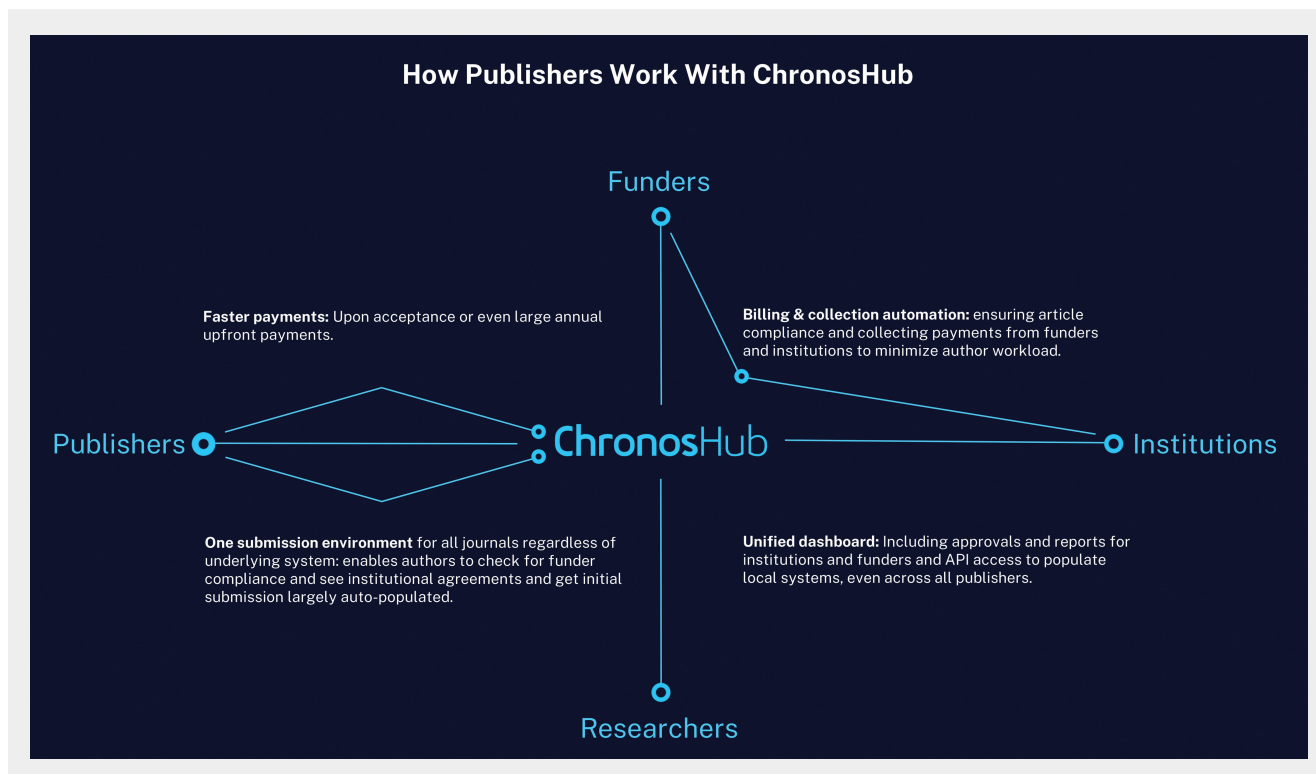
Compliance with FAIR Principles for All Associated Article Data Is Essential

Today's research ecosystem is very fragmented, with enormous data collection costs, storage, and exchange. How does the industry deal with publishing fees, transformative agreements, underlying research data, access to the author accepted version of the manuscript, embargoes, hybrids, vouchers, waivers, and so much more? It is complex, and the plethora of management systems developed does not make it less complicated. The problem often is that these systems do not meet the FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Identifiable, and Reusable) principles, making it difficult to connect them for seamless exchange and reuse of data. However, because globally unique identifiers for all required entities (authors, affiliations, funders, grants, journals, articles, datasets, etc.) are available, the processes can be automated when they are provided. For example, we can automate compliance checks and approvals based on funders' and institutions' policies. For the National Library Consortium of Luxembourg, this means that authors no longer need to manually report back to the funder and claim reimbursement of their publishing fees. Instead, ChronosHub processes the accepted articles and pays the publishing fees directly on behalf of the funder or institution, who then have access to all data and reports on the platform.

A Researcher-Centric Approach Is Key

Everyone can agree that researchers should focus on their research—and not on the process of publishing research. It is vital to put the researcher first and give the author a fast and seamless experience to reduce the administrative overhead.

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How publishers work with ChronosHub.

But authors increasingly need guidance navigating the journal selection process. As a result of both complex funding policies and a rise in institutional agreements, authors no longer know where to publish their work in compliance with their funder's and institution's policies. They also do not know what the conditions are or if there is a publishing fee, voucher, waiver, read-and-publish agreement, or something similar. Guidance is necessary for authors to quickly locate which journals offer a compliant route based on their funding and institutional affiliation. Auto-completing submission forms with FAIR data on the authors, grants, funders, etc., lowers the threshold for the initial submission and enables a direct submission through the system to thousands of journal titles.

At Emerald Publishing, the focus is on the author experience. In collaboration with ChronosHub, they are implementing a workflow for easy submission. Dealing with compliance, approvals, and reporting back to funders/institution is replaced with a seamless process including signage of license agreements and, when possible, obtaining publishing fees paid for directly by the funder or their institution. When an author submits a manuscript through ChronosHub into ScholarOne (the underlying submission system), full automation is

possible by establishing FAIR data. The author's funders and institution can access data directly from the system for their approvals, reporting, and auto-populating their repositories, without the need for time-consuming data collection.

Simplify the Submission Process with Integrations

Integrating systems and processes and giving authors a single point of contact to help them through the submission process is crucial. Publishers need to take advantage of integrations already in place to support the author experience. In that way, authors can see all the publisher's journals in one place and enable a seamless submission, regardless of how many different submission systems a publisher has.

For example, the American Society of Microbiology (ASM) recently activated the integration between EJPress and ChronosHub, making it possible for authors to submit directly to their journals through the platform. The submission form is largely prepopulated with the author's profile information regarding coauthors, affiliations, grants, and funders, using ROR IDs, ORCID IDs, and Grant DOIs. At the same time, they can easily see which of ASM's journals are compliant with different funders' policies.

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Make Institutional Agreements Transparent

The cost of OA adds another level of complexity. As subscription revenues decrease, publishers have developed a variety of OA business models. One of the most common models is based on paying an article processing charge (APC) in order for the article to be published. However, institutions already spend a significant amount on APCs every year, a cost many universities cannot afford to increase. It is also not always transparent what type of OA, license, price, etc., each journal offers. Additionally, more and more universities have institutional agreements and sometimes national consortium agreements with some publishers, giving them other conditions than what the publisher usually offers.

When publishers, funders, and institutions use ChronosHub, the Journal Finder² is customized for each organization and its strategy. In some cases, like for the University of Copenhagen, there is a clear path towards green OA to meet the cost challenge as green OA does not require any APCs to be paid. They use the Journal Finder to guide their authors to publish in journals that offer green OA.

In cases where the APCs cannot be avoided, all the institution's agreements and national consortium deals with

publishers have been made transparent to the researchers through the Journal Finder. For each journal, it is now clear what these agreements include. The researchers can see who will pay and how much, taking discounts, vouchers, and read-and-publish agreements into account.

Collaboration Is the Only Way

No one can solve all these challenges alone. The only way to move forward is to collaborate and jointly mend the research ecosystem. Communication needs to be streamlined between all the key stakeholders: researchers, publishers, funders, and institutions. If we encourage collaboration, we can build bridges, break down barriers, and focus on a successful author experience, which will ultimately benefit all stakeholders. Therefore, we call upon all publishers to reach out to their partners and providers of their submission and production systems to activate further integrations and data exchange with industry initiatives like the OA Switchboard, the Plan S Journal Checker Tool, Sherpa, ChronosHub, and others.

References and Links

1. <https://chronoshub.io/>
2. <https://journalfinder.chronoshub.io/?jf>