



LIBRARY PUBLISHING RESEARCH AGENDA

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Introduction

This document lays out a research agenda for library publishing—an exploration of areas where research is needed to support practice in the field. It was collaboratively developed and written by the members of the Library Publishing Coalition (LPC) Research Committee and the Library Publishing Coalition Community Facilitator. We hope this agenda will encourage LPC members and others in the field to explore these topics in more depth and will serve as a library publishing–focused complement to ACRL’s *Open and Equitable Scholarly Communications* and the Digital Library Federation’s *Research Agenda: Valuing Labor in Digital Libraries*.¹

Each section below identifies a topic of interest, research questions we see as crucial within the topic, and a few selected resources for those who are interested in starting to do research in the area. The topics addressed in this document are **Assessment, Labor, Accessibility, Non-Traditional Research Outputs, Peer Review, and Partnerships**.

Library publishing is still relatively new and there are many areas that need more research.² This document is a starting point, but it is by no means comprehensive. Indeed, many highly important areas have been left unaddressed, including diversity, equity, and inclusion in library publishing practices; resource allocation; sustainability; scalability; and preservation. Our hope is that this document will be a living one, and that it will continue to develop and evolve to address these and other areas of importance.

Assessment

Topic description

A 2017 ARL SPEC Kit on library publishing found that, of 63 ARL member libraries that responded to a survey, the majority (57%) reported having not conducted any assessment

¹ Maron, N., Kennison, R., Bracke, P., Hall, N., Gilman, I., Malenfant, K., Roh, C., & Shorish, Y. (2019). *Open and equitable scholarly communications: Creating a more inclusive future*. Association of College and Research Libraries. <https://doi.org/10.5860/acrl.1>

Digital Library Federation Working Group on Labor in Digital Libraries (2018). *Research agenda: Valuing labor in digital libraries*. [Source](#)

² As a starting point, researchers may wish to consult the LPC’s library publishing bibliography, available at [LPC Bibliography website](#).

of their publishing activities (Taylor et al., 2017).³ Although limited in scope, this data confirms anecdotal evidence that assessment is not yet a routine part of library publishing practice.

Existing literature on assessment in library publishing largely falls into two camps—assessment of the need for library publishing services on campus, and assessment of existing programs and their impacts. The first camp includes case studies such as Craige et al. (2013), in which staff at the University of Utah surveyed and interviewed faculty to assess needs, and then undertook pilot projects emerging from those interactions. This area also includes how-to guides that walk library publishers through the process of assessing publishing needs on campus (LaRose & Kahn, 2016; Lippincott, 2017).

Much of the literature in the second camp, assessment of existing programs and their impacts, focuses on assessment of student outcomes related to involvement in publishing programs (Davis-Kahl & Seeborg, 2013; Weiner & Watkinson, 2014; Hare, 2019). Published examples of and instructions for assessment of publishing programs more broadly exist but are rare. (See, e.g., Swoger, 2015; Molls, 2019.)

Developing assessment capacity in library publishing will require additional published examples of assessment activities that other libraries can use as models. Research building on the SPEC Kit data that surveys non-ARL libraries or investigates how existing assessment activities are structured would also be likely to have an impact in this area. Perhaps more fundamentally, research is needed on how to develop publishing programs that can be meaningfully assessed. McCready and Molls (2018) touch on this in the conclusion of their article on business plan development: “A library publishing business plan will provide a clear understanding of the program’s goals and services, and will provide a path for growth and assessment in the long and short term” (p. 13). Library publishers who wish to assess their programs need to know what success would look like and what measures could be used to determine whether it has been achieved.

Research questions

- What does success look like in library publishing?
- How do we create publishing programs that can be meaningfully assessed?
- What assessment tools and techniques are currently in use by library publishers?
- Which tools and techniques could usefully be adopted or adapted for our field?

³ Taylor, L. N., Keith, B. W., Dinsmore, C., & Morris-Babb, M. (2017). *Libraries, presses, and publishing* (SPEC Kit 357). Association of Research Libraries. <https://doi.org/10.29242/spec.357>

Relevant resources

Craigle, V., Herbert, J., Morrow, A., & Mower, A. (2013). The development of library-led publishing services at the University of Utah. In A. P. Brown (Ed.), *The library publishing toolkit* (pp. 63–77). IDS Project Press.

[Library Publishing Toolkit webpage](#)

Davis-Kahl, S., & Seeborg, M. (2013, April 10–13). *Library publishing and undergraduate education: Strategies for collaboration* [Conference presentation]. ACRL 2013 Conference, Indianapolis, IN. [Conference presentation file](#).

Hare, S. (2019). Library publishers as educators: Crafting curriculum for undergraduate research journals. *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*, 7(1).

<http://doi.org/10.7710/2162-3309.2296>

LaRose, C., & Kahn, M. (2016, May 17–19). *Conducting a comprehensive survey of publishing activity at your institution* [Conference presentation]. 2016 Library Publishing Forum, Denton, TX. [Conference presentation file](#)

Lippincott, S. K. (2017). Starting or growing a publishing program: Considerations and recommendations. In *Library as publisher: New models of scholarly communication for a new era* (pp. 20–46). ATG LLC (Media). <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mpub.9944345>

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. (2019). Assessing the success of library published journals. *Against the Grain*, 31(4). [The publication webpage](#)

Swoger, B. (2015, March 20). *Getting started in assessment for library publishing* [Conference presentation]. Publishing in Libraries Conference, Brockport, NY.

[Conference presentation webpage](#)

Weiner, S. A., & Watkinson, C. (2014). What do students learn from participation in an undergraduate research journal? Results of an assessment. *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*, 2(2), eP1125. <http://doi.org/10.7710/2162-3309.1125>

Labor

Topic description

Library publishing programs often involve faculty, staff, and students. Within the library, these programs can overlap with many different disciplines of librarianship and include a variety of staff, such as scholarly communication librarians, digital scholarship librarians, subject liaisons, and copyright librarians. These librarians and staff bring various levels of experience to library publishing, from prior work in publishing to no previous experience. Further research needed in this area includes locating publishing knowledge gaps among library publishing programs and investigating the labor makeup of these programs.

Libraries are one of the largest employers of students on university and college campuses (Maxey-Harris et al., 2010). With libraries increasingly taking on a publishing role, the work now available to library student workers has blurred the line between a traditional publishing internship and normal library student work (Lippincott, 2017). There are two typical viewpoints for internships and student labor: an austerity measure for decreasing library budgets (Cottrell & Bell, 2015), or a road to learn the necessary skills and provide career roadmaps (Maxey-Harris et al., 2010). This balance between austerity and skill sets is at the intersection of the role and ethics of student labor and library publishing.

The research questions below highlight some of the larger knowledge gaps. A wide range of research related to library publishing and student labor can be undertaken, such as the relationship between traditional publishing internships and fieldwork that is undertaken for course credit. Research on any skill gaps among librarians working within library publishing should also be addressed.

Further research into labor and library publishing will help to build better publishing programs, where staff are adequately trained in the intricacies of publishing and student employees are given the financial incentives along with skills necessary to start their careers. Libraries must understand their own hiring practices, the skill sets of those currently working in library publishing, as well as the nature of paid and unpaid work within the publishing field.

Research questions

- What categories of workers exist within library publishing?
- What are the backgrounds of people working in library publishing?

- What are the overlapping responsibilities of people who work in library publishing (e.g., scholarly communication, digital scholarship, liaising with academic departments, copyright, etc.)?
- Who gets paid in library publishing and who does not? What ethical questions are raised by the use of unpaid labor? How does this tie in with sustainability, turnover, and burnout if we depend on temporary labor?
- How does the workload of the library publisher compare to that of the traditional publisher?

Relevant resources

Cottrell, T. L., & Bell, B. (2015). Library savings through student labor. *The Bottom Line*, 28(3) 82–86. <https://doi.org/10.1108/bl-05-2015-0006>

Lippincott, S. K. (2017). *Library as publisher: New models of scholarly communication for a new era*. ATG LLC (Media). <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.9944345>

Maxey-Harris, C., Cross, J., & McFarland, T. (2010). Student workers: The untapped resource for library professions. *Library Trends*, 59(1–2), 147–165.
[The article webpage.](#)

The MIT Press. (2019, January 24). \$1,205,000 Mellon grant to expand the University Press Diversity Fellowship Program [Press release].
[Press release webpage.](#)

Accessibility

Topic description

Accessibility refers to equal access for all users, including those with disabilities. People generally think of these disabilities in relation to a user's ability to see the printed material; however, a disability refers to anything that may affect the user's ability to interact, manipulate, or process the materials. Historically, people used methods such as braille or audio to accommodate readers, requiring a process of conversion. Today, with digital publications, assistive technology can be incorporated throughout the development of a publishing project to provide immediate access to the same material. Assistive technology generally refers to methods or tools such as screen readers, text to speech tools, voice commands, and others. Unfortunately, the practical success of these

technologies relies not only on their own sophistication, but also on the content authors' and platform creators' willingness to structure their work so that the technologies can interact with it. Equal access to library-published materials requires publishers to thoughtfully and deliberately change their existing practices.

Much of the conversation around accessibility has historically focused on compliance with the applicable policy landscape. And yet, there is a growing push to acknowledge that accessibility is both morally imperative and universally better practice. In *Accessibility & Publishing*, Rosen (2018) states accessibility in publishing should be about “a push for content of the greatest quality and for research with the broadest impact” (p. 4). Greater accessibility enables greater reach for scholarship, and moving the focus from a fear-based compliance orientation to one motivated by the overall advantages of accessible practices will ultimately produce faster and more thorough results.

Significant work has been done to understand the scope and scale of barriers to the access of digital scholarly materials, surveying existing resources and assessing their accessibility. The results are grim and highlight the importance and necessity of a major cultural change in how publishers and content providers prioritize accessibility. In response, there is a growing body of research around best practices and technical guidance for ensuring the accessibility of published works, both from the perspective of the materials themselves, but also the platforms that host them. The user experience community seems to be coming to a consensus around technical standards for accessible platforms and formats. Over time this work should provide useful benchmarks for publishers looking to revisit their practices.

However, questions of how to implement or adapt workflows to produce products that conform to those standards, and how to assess the success and sustainability of those workflows, remain pressing. Publishers must also broaden the scope of their accessibility efforts beyond the focus of the final product: looking at whether publishing platforms are accessible for makers on the back end in addition to readers on the front end; partnering with software developers to integrate accessibility improvements into their development roadmaps; training authors to incorporate accessibility best practices into authoring processes; widening the focus to address the accessibility of datasets and visualizations. Many library publishers—indeed, publishers of all types—are only in the early stages of efforts to transform practices to ensure accessibility. However, to ensure, as Rosen stated, the “greatest quality” publications, publishers should research the practical questions of goal definition, process improvement, and change management that have the potential to dramatically improve the community's success rates for these important projects.

Research questions

- How can library publishers enact and assess workflows ensuring accessibility?
- How do different authoring workflows affect accessibility practices?
- What are the most effective training strategies for library publishing staff and authors moving towards accessibility?
- How can library publishers work with platform developers to ensure accessibility for staff and authors?
- How do we educate authors in incorporating accessibility practices in the authoring process?
- What barriers exist and what incentives could be put in place to move the accessibility conversation from compliance-focus to access for all?
- What are the standards and best practices for ensuring accessibility of new publishing platforms and non-traditional research outputs?

Relevant resources

Borchard, L., Biondo, M., Kutay, S., Morck, D., & Weiss, A. P. (2015). Making journals accessible front & back: Examining open journal systems at CSU Northridge. *OCLC Systems & Services*, 31(1), 35–50. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/OCLC-02-2014-0013>

Çakir, A. (2016). Usability and accessibility of portable document format. *Behaviour & Information Technology* 35(4), 324–334. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2016.1159049>

Dobson, V., & McNaught, A. (2017). Crowdsourcing e-book accessibility information and the impact on staff development. *Insights*, 30(2), 61–70. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1629/uksg.358>

Fulton, C. (2011). Web accessibility, libraries, and the law. *Information Technology and Libraries*, 30(1), 34–43. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ital.v30i1.3043>

Kasdorf, B. (2018). Why accessibility is hard and how to make it easier: Lessons from publishers. *Learned Publishing*, 31(1), 11–18. <https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1146>

Manis, C, & Alexander, H. (2018). The secrets of failing better: Accessible publishing at SAGE. A case study. *Learned Publishing*, 31(1), 63–68. <https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1138>

Mune, C. (2016). Are e-books for everyone? An evaluation of academic e-book platforms' accessibility features. *Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship*, 28(3), 172–182.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1941126X.2016.1200927>

Rosen, S. (2017). Toolkit to support the description of visual resources for accessibility in arts & humanities publications. *VRA Bulletin*, 44(1), Article 6.

[The publication is available here](#)

Rosen, S. S. (2018). *Accessibility & publishing*. ATG LLC (Media).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10212548>

Rothberg, M. (2018). Publishing with accessibility standards from the inside out [Special issue on accessibility in scholarly publishing]. *Learned Publishing*, 31(1), 45–47.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/leap.1149>

Non-Traditional Research Outputs

Topic description

While many library publishers focus on publishing traditional forms of scholarship such as journals, monographs, textbooks, and theses, some have found their niche in supporting non-traditional research outputs that do not align with the interests, goals, or capacities of established scholarly publishers (Lippincott, 2017). These non-traditional outputs may include multimedia digital projects that require flexibility that traditional publishers cannot offer, or digital supplements to traditional publications, such as data sets, digitized primary source materials, or GIS projects. But while there may be a shared intuitive understanding of what makes a research output non-traditional, an examination of the concept may reveal a number of distinctions. By conducting research on non-traditional scholarly outputs, library publishers can better understand the diverse forms that these outputs take, and avoid imposing a one-size-fits-all framework that could result in privileging some formats over others.

The distinction between traditional and non-traditional works can be approached from a number of perspectives. For some, a work's status may be influenced by whether it is published formally or informally, a distinction that is becoming blurry in its own right (Brown et al., 2007). Library publishers, being non-traditional publishers, have found themselves at the center of discussions of what counts as genuine, formal publishing, as opposed to the mere disseminating or hosting of content (Courant, 2007; Esposito, 2015;

Whyte Appleby et al., 2018). It may be that traditional and non-traditional research outputs face different criteria to qualify as *genuinely* or *formally* published.

Furthermore, non-traditional research outputs may be distinguished from their traditional counterparts by virtue of the forms they take. While journal articles, reviews, and monographs are paradigmatic cases of traditional research (even in their digital forms), many digital projects straddle the boundaries between commonly accepted categories of research products, if they fit any of them at all (Maron & Smith, 2009). Moreover, these types of projects raise new questions as they may not always have a clear end or finished state, or there may not be clear demarcations between different versions or editions (Price, 2009).

Additional research in this area is needed for a variety of reasons. Because presentation and mode of delivery often serve as proxies for quality, library publishers need to develop norms and best practices for the packaging of non-traditional research outputs, much the same way that these norms have been established for traditional research. Establishing and following these norms will enable library publishers to present this research in the strongest light and help establish the scholarly merit and legitimacy of non-traditional research outputs. This will also allow library publishers to continue developing reputations as legitimate publishing venues. Finally, a more thorough understanding of the different dimensions of non-traditional research outputs will help libraries and other institutions develop best practices for their evaluation, dissemination, and preservation.

Research questions

- As library publishing moves beyond publishing journals and books, what do we need to know?
- What types of non-traditional research outputs are libraries publishing, and what does “publishing” mean when it comes to non-traditional research outputs?
- What are best practices for publishing different types of research outputs?
- What is the role of the institutional repository as a place for non-traditional research outputs?

Relevant resources

Anderson, K. (2018, February 6). Focusing on value— 102 things journal publishers do (2018 update). *The Scholarly Kitchen*.

[Focusing the value webpage.](#)

Brown, L., Griffiths, R., Rascoff, M., & Guthrie, K. (2007). University publishing in a digital age. *Journal of Electronic Publishing*, 10(3). <https://doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0010.301>

Courant, P. (2007, November 23). Why I hate the phrase “scholarly communication.” *Au Courant*.

[The publication is available here.](#)

Esposito, J. (2015, September 14). What is “publishing” if even a library can do it? *The Scholarly Kitchen*.

[The publication is available here.](#)

Lippincott, S. K. (2017). *Library as publisher: New models of scholarly communication for a new era*. ATG LLC (Media). <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.9944345>

Maron, N. L., & Smith, K. K. (2009). Current models of digital scholarly communication: Results of an investigation conducted by Ithaka Strategic Services for the Association of Research Libraries. *Journal of Electronic Publishing*, 12(1).

<https://doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0012.105>

Price, K. M. (2009). Edition, project, database, archive, thematic research collection: What’s in a name? *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 3(3).

[The publication is available here.](#)

Whyte Appleby, J., Hatherill, J., Kosavic, A., & Meijer-Kline, K. (2018). What’s in a name? Exploring identity in the field of library journal publishing. *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*, 6 (1), eP2209. <https://doi.org/10.7710/2162-3309.2209>

Peer Review

Topic description

Peer review is the process by which research is vetted by the scholarly community. Traditional peer review relies on anonymous reviewers to assess and critique an author’s work. Blind review is supposed to make the evaluation process more fair and impartial—but many scholars have questioned whether this is always the case. As a response to these critiques, some publishers and journals have begun to experiment with

open review. Open review can take many forms, including named review and crowd-sourced review. With named review, the names of the peer reviewers as well as their reports are published online alongside the scholarship in question, making them available for anyone to read. With crowd-sourced review, a draft of the article or book is made available online for the public to comment on before it is officially published. This allows for the authors to get feedback from a greater variety of individuals, including people who might never have been approached to be a peer reviewer. Post-publication peer review allows for more immediate feedback on a publication through commenting mechanisms or even more formal review systems, which may be open for comment or solicited.

Most of the existing research around peer review in academic publishing is discipline specific. There has been some research done on peer review in LIS journals, but no research done on the use of peer review in library publishing. Nonetheless, there is some data to draw from. For many years, the [Library Publishing Directory](#) has asked libraries what percentage of the journals they publish are peer reviewed. The Directory does not ask about the peer review of other types of content, such as textbooks or monographs. In addition, the Directory does not explore what types of peer review library publishers are undertaking (traditional or open), how they facilitate this review, or how they recognize the work of peer reviewers. More information about the extent to which library publishers conduct peer review, as well as their processes for doing so, would help the community form a set of best practices. It could also help library publishers address and even fix some of the valid criticisms of traditional peer review that have come from the academic community.

Research questions

- What is the workflow for peer review among library publishers?
- Are library publishers doing crowd-sourced peer review?
- How do library publishers see the purpose of peer review, and how is that different or the same as, say, university presses?
- How can library publishers implement novel forms of peer review while maintaining their reputations as publishers of high quality scholarship?

Relevant resources

BioMed Central, & Digital Science. (2017). What might peer review look like in 2030? (SpotOn Report). <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.4884878.v1>

Ford, E. (2013). Defining and characterizing open peer review: A review of the literature. *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, 44(4), 311–326. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jsp.44-4-001>

Ortega, J. L. (2017). Are peer-review activities related to reviewer bibliometric performance? A scientometric analysis of Publons. *Scientometrics*, 112, 947–962. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-017-2399-6>

Ross-Hellauer, T. (2017). What is open peer review? A systematic review. *F1000Research*, 6, 588. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.11369.1>

Seeber, M., & Bacchelli, A. (2017). Does single blind peer review hinder newcomers? *Scientometrics*, 113, 567–585. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-017-2264-7>

Shatz, D. (2004). *Peer review: a critical inquiry*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Snell, R. R. (2015). Menage a quoi? Optimal number of peer reviewers. *PLoS ONE*, 10(4), e0120838. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0120838>

Partnerships

Topic description

Despite the popularity and benefits of library publishing services, there have been few studies that explore the relationship between library publishing services and the larger scholarly publishing ecosystem. These studies would help libraries lay the groundwork to engage in scenario planning for library publishing services and help answer questions such as “Who is the service for?” and “How can library publishers develop partnerships to support equity, diversity, and inclusion?”

One natural partnership for library publishing programs is the university press. Indeed, a growing number of presses now report to libraries. In a blog post on *The Scholarly Kitchen*, Joe Esposito explored what is meant when talking about “partnerships” and “collaborations” between libraries and university presses, writing “It’s taken for granted that publishers, at least academic ones, and libraries have a great deal in common and that putting them together organizationally will yield multiple benefits—cost savings, say, or new products and services or even an entirely new business model” (Esposito, 2013). One aspect of this research agenda is to look at the relationship between libraries and

university presses and to examine whether developing such a relationship can not only create a richer source of knowledge, but also lead to sustainable publishing models.

Research questions

- Who are the partners that library publishers currently work with?
- What do our publishing partners need?
- What do the groups we would like to work with (e.g., society publishers) need?
- How do libraries and university presses work together?
- How can library publishers develop partnerships to support equity, diversity, and inclusion?

Relevant resources

Anderson, R. (2013, July 23). Another perspective on library-press “partnerships.” *The Scholarly Kitchen*.

[The publication is available here.](#)

Crow, R. (2008). University-based publishing partnerships: A guide to critical issues. *Against the Grain*, 20(6), Article 6. <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2601>

Cruz, L., & Fleming, R. (2015). Partnerships: The engaged university and library publishing. *OCLC Systems & Services: International digital library perspectives*, 31(4), 196–203.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/OCLC-02-2014-0017>

Esposito, J. (2013, July 16). Having relations with the library: A guide for university presses. *The Scholarly Kitchen*.

[The publication is available here.](#)

Mattson, M., & Friend, L. (2014). A planning perspective for library journal publishing services. *OCLC Systems & Services*, 30(3), 178–191.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/OCLC-01-2014-0005>

Park, J.-H., & Shim, J. (2011). Exploring how library publishing services facilitate scholarly communication. *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, 43(1), 76–89.

<https://doi.org/10.3138/jsp.43.1.76>

Roh, C. (2014). Library-Press collaborations: A study taken on behalf of the University of Arizona. *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*, 2(4), eP1102.

<http://doi.org/10.7710/2162-3309.1102>

Roh, C., & Inefuku, H. (2016). Agents of diversity and social justice: Librarians and scholarly communication. In K. Smith & K. A. Dickson (Eds.), *Open access and the future of scholarly communication: Policy and infrastructure* (pp. 107–128). Rowman and Littlefield.

[The publication is available here.](#)

Santillán-Aldana, J. (2017). Approaches to library publishing services in Latin America.

Journal of Electronic Publishing, 20(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0020.202>

Stapleton, S.C. (2019). A team approach: Library publishing partnerships with scholarly societies. *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*, 7(1).

<http://doi.org/10.7710/2162-3309.2326>

Walters, T. (2012). The future role of publishing services in university libraries. *Portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 12(4), 425–454.

<https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2012.0041>

Watkinson, C. (2016). Why marriage matters: A North American perspective on press/library partnerships. *Learned Publishing*, 29(S1), 342–347.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1044>