06. Governance and accountability

Creating the accountability structures needed to underpin an Open Access publisher

- Key issues
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Key issues

As Judith Fathallah describes in the [Governing Scholar-Led OA Book Publishers](#) report

> the question of governance is not necessarily the first concern of fledgling publishers [...] governance is not the most glamourous or exciting of topics. Its construction can too often be an afterthought, or even considered a hindrance to commencing the urgent work of Open Access publishing or other public-good ventures.

The challenges of putting in place an appropriate governance structure may be felt even more keenly by small or scholar-led presses, which are often operating under time and resource constraints.

However, as Fathallah also notes,

> it is critically important that any Open Access infrastructure establish, maintain and revisit at least a basic governance structure that underpins and guarantees the kind of venture they wish to develop.

Such governance structures assist in clarifying the resources, actors and elements within a publisher's organizational model, including any relevant laws. They also help clarify the division of responsibility and lay out processes for conflict resolution. Having these processes in place from the outset can reduce both labour and potential friction at a later date.

Principles and practices

The [NUP Toolkit](#) provides an example of a governance structure that can be used by university presses as a model. The [Governing Scholar-Led OA Book Publishers](#) report also includes a number of detailed case studies from small and scholar-led publishers, which are particularly valuable because they highlight some of the questions that other small publishers have considered when getting going, alongside, in some cases, frank discussions of the limits of the challenges of implementing a good governance structure. We have drawn on this report in populating our case studies.

There are also a number of wider resources designed to help organisations in developing accountable governance structures and models that publishers can look to for ideas. For new

publishers getting started or wanting to more closely and critically examine their governance and accountability structures, the Educopia Governance in Formation guide provides a helpful set of resources, including templates for facilitating discussions around governance principles among community-led groups, as well as prompts for planning and examples of self-audit activities. Invest in Open Infrastructure has also helpfully detailed its governance structure and principles for others to build on, in its Building Effective and Accountable Governance resource.

The Governing Scholar-Led OA Publishers report suggests that the following elements, resources and actors should be accounted for in a well functioning governance structure:

- Financial resources: managing and dealing with available income.
- Human resources: the people involved in the labour of publication, from press staff to peer reviewers, cover designers and external advisory boards.
- The technological systems and digital infrastructure involved in producing books.
- The rules and bylaws of their form of incorporation, as dictated by location.

A governance structure should ideally also include mechanisms for conflict resolution. Practical matters that may need to be considered include the means of communication between stakeholders and elements; the diversity and representation of boards; and communication to stakeholders and the broader Open Access community.

Accountability and transparency

With respect to such wider issues of community engagement, ensuring that the press is clearly accountability to the communities it serves and engages with. As Nordhoff describes in the Cookbook, accountability can include being transparent about how resources, including public resources are used.

The ScholarLed publishers interviewed for the Governing Scholar-Led OA Publishers report were broadly in agreement that transparency with regard to their procedures and policies was an important aim. Financial transparency can be particularly important, and many smaller and academic-led publishers make their financial information publicly available. Other parts of the press' operation that can be opened up for scrutiny include a publisher's governance charter, organisational structure, staff members and roles, and other policies – statements about a press' values or approaches to Diversity, Equity and Inclusions, for example. Some also make their financial accounts and statements of income and expenditure public.

Advisory boards

Publishers may want to consider the role of one or more advisory boards. Often publishers form advisory boards that relate the publisher's fields of scholarly enquiry, including academics who help with issues such as establishing editorial strategy and/or promoting the publisher to relevant stakeholders. However, publishers may want to consider forming distinct advisory boards for different parts of the press' functioning. For example, Mattering Press distinguishes between an

academic advisory board and an Open Access advisory board, that advises on the legal, financial and other aspects of press operation. punctum books has an Executive Advisory Board, an Editorial Advisory Board and a Library Advisory Board.

Governance and organisational structure

Good governance can also relate to a publisher's internal organisational structure and how it interacts with external stakeholders. Section 3.11 of the Cookbook describes Language Science Press' organisational structure and the different roles and responsibilities within that structure. It makes a convincing case for benefits of a well-designed organisational structure to reduce friction within the press and to increase a publisher's efficiency and professionalism when dealing with external stakeholders. The book includes an organizational chart that depicts how internal and external stakeholders interact with one another, which provides a model that could readily be adapted by a small to medium press.

Case studies

Goverance structures

- punctum books has two co-directors, two associate directors with specific roles (Editorial Development and Community and Library Outreach respectively), plus various staff roles such as web developer and system administrator. They also have an Executive Advisory Board (for business matters) and an Editorial Advisory Board (for the manuscript review process) and a Library Advisory Board (for library outreach programmme and services to academic libraries) (Business Models for OA Books)

- As a charity, Mattering Press is formally governed by its trustees, however, these trustees also comprise its Editorial Board and, in effect, run the press' day-to-day operations. The press also has a board providing input into the subject matter of its books (the Science and Technology Studies Advisory Board), and the Open Access Advisory Board, which provides input into its publishing work more broadly (Mattering Press).

- African Minds is governed by a Board of Trustees, with Moore Management Services appointed as accountants and auditors of the Trust. The Board appoints the Editorial Board which consists of independent scholars who are experts in their respective disciplines. Their role is to assist African Minds in the review of publishing proposals and manuscripts (Business Models for OA Books).

- Open Book Publishers is governed by a board which compromises the three Directors of the organistaion. In line with the structure of their organisation (A UK-based Community Interest Company), Directors have shares, and these are divided in such a way that two people are required for a majority. Acquisition and publishing decisions are made by the three Directors although the press does use distinct Editorial Boards for particular book series (Business Models for OA Books).

- Lever Press has a governing board (Oversight Committee) and Faculty Editorial Board. Lever Press is governed by its participating members. An Editorial Board, composed of Faculty members from participating institutions, oversees the editorial and review processes. The Oversight Committee includes representatives of participating institutions; it directs the execution of Lever's business plan (Business Models for OA Books).

- Amherst College Press has an Advisory Board composed of members of the OA university press world and an editorial board populated by Faculty staff of Amherst College (Business Models for OA Books).

- University of Ljubljana Press is governed by the University Dean it is part of the university structure. But the press also has an Advisory Board made of academics from different UoL departments. The Board looks into problematic areas, provides guidance and suggests solutions (Business Models for OA Books).

- [Stockholm University Press](#) has the Head who is also the Library Director and also acts as Vice-chair of the Publishing Committee consisting of one chair and four representatives from the Faculties of the University. It is responsible for overseeing the review process and publication decisions for books and journals. Members of the Committee are nominated by Faculty members and selected by the President of the University. Each book series has its own Editorial Advisory Board, responsible for the peer-review process and for ensuring the academic quality of books. The Board makes decisions on which proposals to accept (Business Models for OA Books).

- [meson press](#) is as a cooperative with a democratic governance structure: each member has one vote of equal importance. The cooperative is open to new members; however, so far it has consisted of the three founding members only (Business Models for OA Books).

- [Language Science Press](#) is owned by three associates; two are press Directors responsible for scientific quality, while the third is the Managing Director responsible for administration. The press has an Advisory Board that decides on acceptance or rejection of series proposals (Business Models for OA Books).

- [Helsinki University Press](#) has an Academic Board with members coming from international institutions. The Board accepts for publication proposals presented by the press Editors (Business Models for OA Books).

- [Finnish Literature Society Press](#) is governed by the Board of Directors, which is elected by Society delegates and the Secretary General is in charge of SKS's opertaions. The press also has a Publishing Director and three Editorial Boards responsible for publishing decisions (Business Models for OA Books).

- [FF Open Press](#) has a Publishing Board consisting of humanities and social sciences scholars, which is responsible for the editorial process, supported by thematic Editors (Business Models for OA Books).

Transparency and accountability

- Language Science Press has a [transparency notice](#) published on its website, has an [Open Data repository](#), and publishes annual reports each year, providing a range of information about the press' work, activities and environmental impact (see, for example, [the 2022 report](#)).

- punctum books makes the following information available on their websites: end of the year financial statements, income and expenditure, staff roles, benefits and salary roduction costs and overheads. This information is released annually in an online statement on pubpub, and also sent to punctum's library advisors.

- Open Book Publishers provides detailed annual reports, including information about how its books have been used, the press' work with diverse communities, and notable achievements (see, for example, [the 2022 report](#)).

Questions to guide good practice

- What principles shape the press' governance structure?
- Does the scholarly community (associations, universities, faculties, boards of academics/librarians, other friendly OA publishers) have a say in how the press is governed and run?
- Is there a Diversity Equality and Inclusion (DEI) policy on the publisher's website? Is diversity evidenced in the press' work, for example in its authors, editors and reviewers?
- Does the publisher regularly report on its finances? Is there transparency about the publisher's costs per title/first copy costs)?
- Do financial and annual reports detail how resources, including public funds, have been used?

Resources

- [Cookbook](), Chapter 2
- [NUP Toolkit](), Setting up a press
- [Business Models for OA Books]()
- [Governing Scholar-Led OA Book Publishers]()
- Educopia (2021). [Governance in Formation: Identifying Priorities for Action and Making Decision]()
- Invest in Open Infrastructure (2022). [Building Effective and Accountable Governance]()