

# 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 glamorous 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 accountable 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.

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