Key issues

There are many business models that have been tested/used by OA presses in different countries and at different times. The COPIM Revenue Models Report contains a comprehensive list of business models used by different publishers, which it classifies into four categories:

1. Earned revenue models, such as book sales, BPCs, donations, cross-subsidies, embargoes on OA, title crowdfunding, advertising, endowments, third-party licensing
2. Embedded institutional support, such as in the case of library-based publishers or university presses which are partially or wholly financially supported by their host institutions
3. Third-party subsidies, such as grants from funders, government, etc.
4. Consortial models: such as membership fees, sharing infrastructure, Subscribe-to-Open agreements and library crowdfunding

As the report describes, the reality is that many OA publishers will combine revenue streams across these categories. This is richly documented in Business Models for OA Books, which showcases how presses adapted those models in distinct national and academic contexts. These distinct contexts are important – for example, Language Science Press makes active use of its highly engaged community of linguists as part of its crowdsourced proofreading model. Publishers in some countries (e.g. meson press in Germany, African Minds in South Africa) have been able to make good use of more readily available, in their countries, funding for Book Processing Charges (BPCs).

However, for the purposes of this guide, we will pull out five prominent revenue models, which we discuss alongside case studies where relevant:

- Book sales
- Book Processing Charges
- Crowdfunding
- Institutional support
- Library membership programmes