

# Membership programmes

Recent years have seen an increasing number of publishers launching membership programmes to provide an additional revenue stream. The aim of a membership scheme is for the publisher to spread the costs of producing Open Access books across a number of supporting institutions.

The model involves the publisher approaching the library for direct financial support, perhaps with the publisher highlighting the relevance of its books to the universities staff/students, as well as its track record for publishing high-quality Open Access texts over a period of time, and then the institution making a decision as to whether to commit to supporting the publisher for an agreed period, for an agreed fee. The supporting library is usually offered at least some benefits in return for its support (e.g. staff and students are being provided with free access to additional ebook formats for example, receiving public recognition for their support, receiving an annual report on the publisher's activities). It is common practice for publishers to have a sliding "tiered" scale of fees depending, for example, on the type and/or size of the subscribing institution, geographic region, and national currency.

Publishers with an existing backlist of non-Open Access books that are looking to transition to becoming a partially or wholly Open Access publisher may also wish to consider the [Opening the Future](#) revenue model for their membership programme. In the Opening the Future model, supporting institutions receiving access to the publisher's closed backlist, with income from the membership scheme supporting Open Access publication on the frontlist (i.e. for new books). This is

Running a membership programme can be labour intensive. The most labour intensive element is likely to be outreach. The success or failure of a library membership scheme depends to a large degree on the ability of the publisher to convince dozens, if not hundreds, of libraries that they should support the publisher financially. The work of the publisher is then to contact libraries to set up meetings to discuss their offer, as well as to promote its membership offer in other settings – at events, for example. This requires a carefully considered outreach campaign. We have recently [published advice](#) for initiatives considering conducting outreach with libraries directly, based on our own experiences. For larger publishers with the ability to run at least some parts of their library membership scheme independently, third parties can assist – sometimes by hosting offers via platforms used by libraries and managing the contracting process (e.g. [Jisc](#) in the UK), sometimes doing this alongside taking an active role in also promoting particular programmes (e.g. [Lyrasis](#) in the USA/Canada).

Because running a fully fledged membership scheme may be too resource intensive for many smaller/scholar-led publishers, publishers may want to consider whether the [Open Book Collective](#) is right for them. We are a charity that offers small and medium-size publishers to create their own

membership programmes, but with the Open Book Collective taking on the costs of managing these programmes. The [Open Book Collective](#) undertakes library outreach work on behalf of our publisher members, including direct meetings with librarians and presenting at events, as well as the administrative work involved in handling subscriptions. Publishers will need to meet our [membership criteria](#), which includes a requirement that publishers must either be Diamond Open Access publishers, or can propose a membership model which has the potential – with sufficient levels of membership subscriptions, and in a time period the publisher can specify – to enable a publisher to become a predominantly Open Access publisher. By that we mean a publisher that publishes at least 75% of its front lists (i.e. its new books) on an Open Access basis.

[Knowledge Unlatched](#) also runs what are, in effect, membership programmes for a small number of subject focused publishers. In Knowledge Unlatched's model, universities make 'pledges' connected to specified numbers of publisher titles. By running a pledging programme via Knowledge Unlatched, [Language Science Press](#) has succeeded in eliminating BPCs for authors, for upwards of 30 or more books per year. Publishers are not, however, required to commit to publishing a certain proportion of their output on an Open Access basis. This means that large commercial presses are also included in pledging programmes, with pledges contributing only to publish specified numbers of titles Open Access in particular series or subject area. Alongside Language Science Press, the only other Open Access book publisher funded via Knowledge Unlatched's pledging programme is, at the time of writing, [Open Knowledge Press](#), with pledges supporting its [Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology](#) resource.

Another similar programme is run by JSTORE, [Path to Open](#) was developed in partnership with the [American Council of Learned Societies \(ACLS\)](#), [University of Michigan Press](#), and [The University of North Carolina Press](#). This funding model provides libraries with affordable access to closed frontlist titles that are released in Open Access after a three-year embargo. For information about other funding opportunities please see [this resource](#) from the [Radical Open Access Collective](#).

## Case studies

- [Open Book Publishers'](#) Library Membership Programme was introduced in 2014 and has over 250 supporting libraries. In return for support, libraries receive some of the eBooks normally offered for a fee, discounts on print copies and other benefits (e.g., talks by OBP's employees at institutions participating in the Membership Programme). The press became self-sustaining only after introduction of their library memberships programme ( [Business Model for OA Books](#))
- [punctum's](#) Supporting Library Membership Program was inspired by [Open Library of Humanities](#). Libraries can opt in for one year at a time (and can decide at the end of each year whether or not to continue supporting [punctum books](#)) or they can choose to lock in for 3- or 5-year cycles of support.

- [Language Science Press](#) uses what Nordhoff calls “a collaborative funding model” as its main source of revenue. Libraries finance the press through a membership/subscription programme (they “pledge” support for a 3-year period). Language Science Press relies on Knowledge Unlatched as an intermediary in managing the programme. Based on Language Science Press’s experience, Nordhoff argued that “institutional membership is by far the most interesting [revenue source] with the other ones far behind” ([LSP Business Model](#) p. 65). Language Science Press adapted the model from [OpenEditions](#). It is based on a tiered system taking into account the “size of the institution and purchasing power of the country” ([Cookbook](#), 54). Nordhoff’s advice for presses intending to test this model is to make the membership fee as low as possible to get more subscriptions, which is more profitable than setting up a high fee and consequently getting fewer subscriptions from only a handful of wealthy institutions. However, this is a question on which there is no clear consensus, given this is a relatively new financial model for Open Access book publishing.

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