

Modeling library editorial workflows to promote open publication of scholarly journals: The American Library Publishing Workflows project

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Introduction

Library Publishing Workflows is a collaboration between Educopia Institute, the Library Publishing Coalition, and 12 North American partner libraries that seeks to investigate, synchronize, and model a range of workflows to increase the capacity of libraries to publish open access, peer-reviewed scholarly journals. The project is funded by a two-year, \$241,510 National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Most library publishers have developed services in response to local needs, and initial workflows are generally home-grown, varied, and idiosyncratic. This represents a missed opportunity for comparative analysis and peer learning; it also yields frequent omissions of crucial workflow steps, such as contributing metadata to aggregators (essential for discovery and impact) and depositing content in preservation repositories (necessary for a stable scholarly record).

The workflow models and documentation developed in this project will be used by libraries of all types that are engaged in scholarly publishing, including libraries establishing their first publishing workflows and those looking to expand or improve their publishing services. We hope this project will help libraries provide a strong alternative to commercial publishing for a wider range of journals, representing a significant advance in the development of open and academy-owned scholarship.

Partners and Personnel

Educopia Institute

The Educopia Institute is a US-based nonprofit that empowers collaborative communities to create, share, and preserve knowledge. Every activity Educopia Institute undertakes is explicitly designed to foster communities of engagement and encourage system-wide changes

that empower and enable libraries, archives, museums, and other institutions to increase the availability and sustainability of knowledge in all forms.

Library Publishing Coalition

The Library Publishing Coalition (LPC) is an independent, community-led membership association of academic and research libraries and library consortia engaged in scholarly publishing. The LPC extends the impact and sustainability of library publishing and open scholarship by providing a professional forum for developing best practices and shared expertise.

Partner Libraries

A diverse cohort of 12 North American partner libraries includes flagship, land grant, and public research universities (Wayne State and the Universities of Michigan, Pittsburgh, and Alberta); private research and liberal arts universities (Columbia, Illinois Wesleyan, Pacific, and University of Redlands); consortia representing public research universities (California Digital Library), private liberal arts colleges (Claremont Colleges), and historically black colleges and universities (Atlanta University Center).

Project Team & Advisors

The project team is composed of members of the Educopia Institute staff: two principal investigators guide the research, a project manager conducts the research and day-to-day operations, a communications specialist develops research communication plans, branding and graphic design, and outreach, and an administrative coordinator handles administrative tasks for the project. LPW also has an advisory board comprised of experts from the scholarly communications and library field to help guide the project and provide feedback throughout.

Rationale & Objectives

Over the past three decades, library publishing has coalesced around the needs of local scholars, researchers, and students who have approached the library for expertise and assistance in how best to use digital platforms to produce and disseminate knowledge.¹ As of 2017, most of the 123 ARL member libraries were engaged in publishing activities,² and the most recent [Library Publishing Directory](#) includes 152 entries from libraries of all types that support a wide range of scholarly outputs. Library publishers have been steadily refining what once were largely home-grown, variable processes into maturing publishing services and programs. They have also been growing a strong professional community of practice in which

¹ Karla L. Hahn, *Research Library Publishing Services: New Options for University Publishing* (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, 2008), p. 7.
<https://www.arl.org/storage/documents/publications/research-library-publishing-services-mar08.pdf> (last accessed 03/11/2019).

² Laurie N. Taylor, Brian W. Keith, Chelsea Dinsmore, and Meredith Morris-Babb, *Libraries, Presses, and Publishing. SPEC Kit 357* (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, November 2017), p. 2.
<https://publications.arl.org/Libraries-Presses-Publishing-SPEC-Kit-357/> (last accessed 3/19/19)

they are regularly documenting their outputs (e.g., the [Library Publishing Directory](#)) and sharing knowledge and lessons learned (e.g., the [Library Publishing Forum](#)).

A key step in this maturation process is developing and building consensus around standard operational functions, both as individual programs and as a community of practice. Today's library publishing workflows—meaning, depictions of all of the functions performed by a library publisher as part of its regular operations—are generally undocumented. This makes cross-comparison across publishers difficult at best, leading to missed opportunities for peer learning and sharing of emerging good practices. It also makes it more challenging for individual publishers to evaluate their processes and readily identify crucial steps they may be omitting, such as contributing metadata to aggregators (essential for discovery and impact) and depositing content in preservation repositories (necessary for a stable scholarly record).

In support of this goal, Library Publishing Workflows is conducting interviews with library publishers at partner institutions, and documenting and visualizing the workflows for broader distribution. We focus specifically on journal workflows as both the most common area of practice for library publishers, and as an area where workflows have been established by other types of publishers, allowing for comparison and adaptation as appropriate. The documentation produced through this project will help the library publishing subfield to formalize its workflows through careful documentation, analysis and comparison, and broad circulation of tested models.

The LPC community has also identified workflow development as a key component needed in the professionalization of library publishing. While a focus on core services, responsiveness to local needs, and experimentation are all assets for this publishing subfield,³ they can result in a lack of attention to standards and best practices. The bootstrapped nature of many library publishing programs—accomplishing a lot with little support or formal training—also contributes to this phenomenon. By mapping out and comparing journal workflows, the community of library publishers can identify places where relevant standards and best practices exist and can be adopted. They can also pinpoint areas where best practices have not yet been developed, and work together to develop them efficiently and effectively.

One major focus of this grant is to foster communication with the broader library publishing community throughout the grant period. We will be releasing blog posts, interview snippets, white papers, quarterly updates to the Library Publishing Coalition, and other findings as we continue to conduct our research. We are also building in a number of opportunities for input from publishers outside of our partner group, to ensure that our work speaks to the broad and diverse community of library publishers.

³ Melanie Schlosser, “Building Capacity for Academy-Owned Publishing through the Library Publishing Coalition,” *Library Trends* Vol. 67, No. 2 (2018).
https://librarypublishing.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/LibraryTrends_LPC_2018.pdf (last accessed 03/18/2019).

Methodology

Library Publishing Workflows was modeled very closely on a previous Educopia Institute project—[OSSArcFlow](#)—that documented the use of open source software in born-digital archiving communities. The LPW team has benefited greatly from discussions with the OSSArcFlow team and some overlap in both participants and advisors.

This project is occurring over 5 phases: 1) planning and formative assessment, 2) initial interviews with partner libraries and initial data analysis, 3) initial workflow documentation and in-person meeting, 4) final partner interviews and full workflow documentation, and 5) release, evaluation, and reporting. As we are writing, we are in the early stages of phase 3.

Phase 1: Planning and formative assessment

During the planning and setup phase, we hired a project manager, established a regular meeting schedule for all partners, advisors, and team members, and established a visual identity and communications plan for the project.

We also conducted a formative assessment of existing workflow documentation models to inform data collection instruments and the later development of documentation templates. The formative assessment examined research into workflow documentation best practices, and also included a scan of public workflows in the library community. The project team also weighed in on the benefits and drawbacks of different types of documentation and visualization.

Phase 2: Initial interviews with partner libraries and initial data analysis

During the second phase, we conducted individual interviews with each partner library to document their existing journal publishing workflows. During our initial conversations, we realized that our partners employed many different workflows within the same publishing program, so we invited them to discuss several different workflows with us in the interviews, resulting in about half of the partners discussing more than one workflow. Although each partner institution or consortium has one primary liaison, we encouraged them to invite as many coworkers as they felt was necessary for the interview, so we had between 1 and 4 interviewees for each partner library. Interviews were conducted using Zoom video conferencing software, and audio and video recordings were made of the calls.

For each workflow, we first asked partners some basic questions about the workflow: What is the basic unit of content content, or in other words, do they usually work with issues, whole articles, or some other grouping? At what point does the library first encounter the content? At what point does the library stop actively working on the unit of content?

We then asked the interviewees to identify the high-level phases that make up the workflow. Once those phases were established, we walked through each one asking for detailed steps, tasks, and processes that were carried out in each phase. We also asked participants to be sure to identify all individuals and systems or tools used during each of the steps.

Finally, we asked participants which parts of the workflows were most difficult and why, and asked if there were any things they would like to be doing as part of the workflow but aren't able to.

We then repeated all of these questions for each workflow the partner wished to share.

The LPW team took live notes in a shared document during the interview, and the Project Manager went back through recordings of each interview to provide greater detail and accuracy to the notes, though we stopped short of creating a full transcript. The notes were then used to create a structured textual description for each workflow that included the starting and ending points, each of the phases and steps that occurred with each, including exceptions, contingencies, and a fair amount of details. These documents are being used to create the visual representations and, following revisions in the second year of the project, these will be published as textual descriptions of the workflows.

Phase 3: Initial workflow documentation and in-person meeting:

During this phase, we will begin documenting the partners' journal publishing workflows based on the data collected during the first phase of interviews. This documentation will happen through an iterative process (in this phase and the next), with partners actively participating in each stage.

For the first stage, the team used the formative assessment to develop 5 different potential visual workflow templates using [Lucidchart](#) software. We then gathered feedback from partners about which ones were most clear, offered the most flexibility, and best fit the unique features of the different workflows.

The second stage will involve creating draft workflow documentation for a subset of the partners for review and discussion by the full group.

We had initially planned for the third stage to be an in-person review of all visualizations at an in-person meeting at Wayne State University in Detroit in July 2020, but due to COVID-19, we are reassessing how that feedback will take place.

At the time of this writing, we are unsure when the in-person meeting will take place. In addition to the aforementioned feedback process, the meeting will also function like a symposium—panels and discussions focused on different pain points, areas of opportunity, and divergence and convergence. This portion of the meeting will be broadcast as a webinar and also posted freely online afterwards.

In addition to the workflow documentation and diagrams, we are also using other data collected, such as pain points and steps and services libraries would like to provide in the future. We presented [pain point findings in a poster](#) at Library Publishing Forum 2020, and are focusing on a social media and blog campaign to highlight issues our partners face. We are also in the process of collecting more data about pain points from library publishers beyond our 12 partners to share more about the pain points they encounter in their process.

Phase 4: Final partner interviews and full workflow documentation:

During this phase, we will conduct final interviews with all partners, covering additional data needs identified during the project and any changes to the partners' workflows that have been implemented during the course of the project. We will also complete and finalize workflow documentation for all partners based on their feedback. We will work closely with tool developers and other stakeholders to consider various ways the workflow documentation may be used now and in the future.

Phase 5: Release, evaluation, and reporting:

In this final phase, all workflow documentation, including workflow visualizations, text documentation of workflows, and comparative visualizations and data, will be released with a CC-BY license to encourage sharing and reuse, and we will work with our project partners, the Library Publishing Coalition, tool and service providers, and other community partners to disseminate it widely. At this time, we will also finalize and release a template version of our workflow documentation and guidance documentation for libraries that wish to map their own workflows. The results of this analysis will be shared with the community via publications and/or presentations coupled with a strategic communications campaign that draws on partner and staff reflections to highlight accomplishments, lessons learned, and future uses of project outputs.

Follow Library Publishing Workflows Progress

We will be sharing more information about our partner workflows, pain points, and other areas of interest throughout the grant period through several different feeds. We will tweet updates from Library Publishing Coalition's Twitter account ([@LibPubCoalition](#)) and using the hashtag #LibPubWorkflows for further discussion. We will also be releasing updates on the [LPC Blog](#), and sharing via the [LPC's mailing list](#). You can also feel free to contact the Project Manager at brandon@educopia.edu