



# AMERICAN ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

7 February 2019

The American Astronomical Society (AAS), established in 1899 and based in Washington, DC, is the major organization of professional astronomers in North America. Its membership of about 8,000 individuals also includes physicists, mathematicians, geologists, engineers, and others whose research and educational interests lie within the broad spectrum of subjects comprising contemporary astronomy, planetary science and heliophysics. The mission of the AAS is to enhance and share humanity's scientific understanding of the universe.

As a U.S. tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, the AAS owns, operates, and publishes flagship journals in the field, *The Astronomical Journal (AJ)*, *The Astrophysical Journal (ApJ)*, *The ApJ Letters*, and *The ApJ Supplements Series*. The AJ was established in 1849 and came into AAS ownership 100 years later; the ApJ was established in 1895, 100 years before becoming one of the very first scholarly journals online. One of the conditions for taking ownership of the ApJ from the University of Chicago in the 1970s included a provision whereby journal proceeds were not to be used to directly fund the ongoing operations of the society. This provision persists to this day. The AAS journals ceased to be physically printed in 2014 and have not included advertising since the early years of the 20th century.

## **1. Is there anything unclear or are there any issues that have not been addressed by the guidance document?**

The AAS has been successful in providing open access to our journals and keeping that access open without additional licenses and paywalls since creating online editions of our journals starting in 1995. Currently, all content is made freely available to anyone 12 months after publication. Individual member subscriptions are available at very low cost, public libraries may subscribe for free to the journals and the subscription cost for institutions is one of the lowest costs per page available.

## **It is not clear to us that the Plan's requirement for CC-BY licenses serves the content and the community in the long run.**

The AAS has always asked its authors for transfer of copyright and in return grants wide reuse rights back to authors, including the right to post in non-commercial institutional and preprint repositories. Our field is small compared to other scholarly disciplines and as a result of our generous author reuse rights, researchers have long been able to ask colleagues directly for articles to which they don't have access through an institutional subscription. We have coexisted and collaborated with the ArXiv preprint server from the time when it was known simply as "astro-ph", which allows for preprint versions of the submitted or accepted article to be made available at no cost to interested readers.

Because the AAS commits to protecting and preserving all of its journal content in perpetuity, authors can be certain that their work is shielded from commercial misuse and is preserved in a format that can

be migrated to future electronic delivery platforms. For these reasons, a CC-BY copyright requirement would not be in the best interest of the researchers served by the AAS.

## **2. Are there other mechanisms or requirements funders should consider to foster full and immediate Open Access of research outputs?**

Since the early part of the 20th century, the AAS has run its flagship journals from two distinct revenue streams: page charges paid by the author(s) and subscription charges for libraries. With two sources of revenue, the AAS has been able to keep the charges to both groups at the lowest possible level. Our financial model long predates the modern Open Access movement and our author charges have been steadily reduced over the past 20 years, whenever cost savings could be realized. This ongoing reduction in costs to our community has been stipulated by our leadership, which is composed of researchers in the field. The acceptance rate of our journals has always been high, because working with authors and referees to arrive at publishable results is a part of our mission <https://journals.aas.org/business-model/>.

**Funders should carefully consider the community-focused management of publications already well established at professional societies like the AAS. We are concerned about the limitations on author publication choice that would inevitably result from a ban on hybrid journals and a cap on APCs.**

Our journals include results from many international teams, and so we are already accountable on an annual basis to authors based in over 75 countries outside the US, as well as to authors funded by US federal agencies <https://science.nasa.gov/researchers/volunteer-review-panels>. While our journals are embargoed for only 12 months, we have also worked for many years with organizations like INASP (<https://www.inasp.info/about>) to provide extremely low cost subscriptions to developing countries and we provide immediate access to AAS members for a \$25.00 fee. Starting in 2017 we began offering a Gold OA option to authors who want their articles accessible immediately.

Our minimal subscription rates, maximum 12-month embargo, and Gold OA option combined with modest author charges keep AAS journal content affordable and accessible to the global community. Our hybrid model is driven by our mission to ensure that AAS Journals are of the community, by the community, and for the benefit of the community. The ban on hybrid journals put forth in Plan S thus goes directly against the interest of the astronomical community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the guidance on the implementation of Plan S.

Sincerely,



Kevin B. Marvel, PhD  
Executive Officer  
American Astronomical Society  
1667 K Street NW, Washington, DC 20006 USA  
Tel: +1-202-328-2010  
[kevin.marvel@aaas.org](mailto:kevin.marvel@aaas.org)