



The Oberlin Group
A Consortium of Liberal Arts College Libraries

Request for proposal for providing services to the Oberlin Group for the launch of a new Open Access publishing venture for the liberal arts

4th November 2014

RFP Responses Close: 1st December 2014

Responses and questions should be directed to:

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1 THE PROGRAM

1.1 Background

In 2013, the Oberlin Group (a consortium of liberal arts college libraries) embarked on a program of research to investigate the feasibility of establishing an Open Access monograph publishing venture, with a focus on better serving authors and readers, more innovative application of technology, and greater dissemination of knowledge. The project was christened the Lever Initiative. Further information is available at:

<http://leverinitiative.wordpress.com/>

This project has been managed on behalf of The Oberlin Group by a Task Force (<http://leverinitiative.wordpress.com/about/project-team>), facilitated by an external consultant (Melinda Kenneway).

The conclusion of the research phase was that there are many challenges to overcome in developing new models of publishing scholarship. The current tenure and promotion system is closely tied to conventional formats and established Presses, and there is limited demand currently for more experimental approaches amongst authors. However, new technology offers many potential enhancements to the traditional monograph, which are likely to help increase and broaden readership. In the past couple of years there has been an accelerating growth in Open Access monograph initiatives, from both established and newly emerging Presses. Many of these cite significant readership for their online editions.

It is the view of the Oberlin Group that it's a key part of our role to help drive positive change to harness the potential of new technologies to reinvent the monograph. Leadership and tangible examples are required to explore and demonstrate the potential of more open and innovative forms of publishing. The best way to learn and shape the future is to be a part of it. To that end, The Oberlin Group wishes to launch a new publishing venture in partnership with an existing publisher, hence the issue of this RFP.

We are using the working title: **LEVER PRESS** for this initiative, as a temporary placeholder identity.

1.2 Key objectives of the Lever Press

Key objectives are as follows:

- Demonstrate the long-term viability of Open Access
- Increase collaboration amongst like-minded institutions and individuals
- Increase the value and impact of library collection expenditure
- Position the library as content creators as well as collectors and curators
- Accelerate innovation in publishing processes and formats
- Champion new methods of evaluation for scholarly monographs
- Enhance the reputation of participating institutions
- Encourage active participation by faculty and students
- Build a world-leading brand in the front rank of arts and humanities publishers

1.3 Guiding principles for the Lever Press

Our guiding principles are:

- Publish selectively, with an overriding focus on quality of research, writing and ideas
- Be creative in tracking the emergence of new topics and disciplines
- Pay attention to production values to ensure the best possible experience for readers
- Work collaboratively and transparently with authors
- Give authors choices on formats and license agreements
- Encourage inclusion of multimedia materials and experimentation with technology
- Market energetically to ensure wide exposure for the authors and their work
- Actively experiment with new forms of publishing and measure and share results widely

1.4 Mission and vision

The vision of the Lever Press is to inspire excellence and innovation in the selection and presentation of scholarship; and to accelerate Open Access in the arts and humanities. Our mission is to publish exciting scholarship and make this accessible to the broadest possible audience. Our values are excellence, openness, collaboration, innovation, and care.

1.5 Value proposition

We will offer our authors the traditional publisher experience they value (high quality editorial support and production standards), together with the benefits of unrestricted access to their work that Open Access provides. We will build deeply supportive relationships with our authors, helping curate their work to the highest standard and offering them innovative choices on formats and presentation. We will work quickly and responsively - making best use of technology to increase workflow efficiencies, reduce costs and improve services to authors and readers. We will focus equal attention on the performance of authors' work after publication, providing them with unparalleled marketing support and access to a range of metrics about how their books are being used. We will use our expertise as librarians to enrich publications with valuable additional metadata to increase its discoverability – particularly outside of niche disciplines. Our brand partnerships will give the Lever Press immediate prestige, as will the people we recruit for our Governing Council and the authors we carefully select for our initial publications.

In short, we will offer a personal service and wide dissemination for authors, coupled with the best possible experience for readers. In order to offer universal access to scholarship, we will share our experiences so that other Open Access projects may benefit.

1.6 Funding and business model

The Oberlin Group wish to establish an Open Access monograph publishing program, which will be funded initially by contributions from each participating College (we currently estimate 40 or so members will support this program). The level of that contribution is to be

determined by the finally agreed scope and costs of the program. In addition, The Oberlin Group will be seeking partnerships with other organizations to further support and extend this program; so membership will be open to other institutions beyond the Group. A multi-year commitment (5 years currently proposed) will be sought from each participating institution. We have many questions about the advisability/inadvisability of raising revenue through book publication charges, and we covet your thoughts in your proposal about the pros and cons of such charges.

Additional grants may be sourced to further support 'special projects' – books that we select for particular technological enhancement (see section 1.7), or we would of course be interested in working with a partner who might already have grants or funds in place to support innovative forms of publishing.

We are anticipating that revenues will be raised from Print on Demand products and possibly other freemium-based services.. It is currently the Group's strong preference to offer all digital versions as Open Access (e.g. as opposed to offering OA only on the PDF), but this can be discussed.

1.7 Scope and formats

In a digital Open Access environment form matters less than ever. This is a golden opportunity to open the door to the best academic writing irrespective of precise length and form. There are, of course, costs associated with editing and composition, which will affect decisions about what to publish. But in theory there should be no distinction drawn between a monograph of 100 pages and one of 700 pages. The only relevant question for the publishing staff of the Press should be its scholarly quality. Paramount importance should be attached to establishing an academic list of real pedigree. Reputation will flow from that.

We currently envisage publishing five books in year one, rising to fifty per annum by year five. We envisage a mix of long and short-form publications. Specific projects will be selected for digital innovation based on the appropriateness of the subject matter, interest of the author etc. These will be treated as case studies, with measures of interest/effectiveness put into place so that the impact can be measured. We will widely promote these activities, and also the effect of Open Access publishing on readership and revenues – as part of our drive not to only to publish great scholarship, but also champion wider changes within the industry.

Our core books program will focus on the traditional values that authors appreciate – high quality editorial support/peer review, production standards and so on; but with a focus on digital formats and innovation in presentation. All books will be made available Open Access, ideally with a CC-BY license. A paid Print on Demand version should be available.

We will not at this stage set target subject areas for acquisition, but would instead work closely with our publishing partner to determine the best areas of opportunity and ‘fit’. We would also want to maximize our relationships with Faculty to help identify promising areas and authors.

1.8 Brand considerations

It is envisaged that this publishing venture will be an imprint, produced in partnership with an established Press whose own brand will lend credibility and value to our fledgling activities. We won’t brand our initiative as ‘Oberlin’; instead, we will create a new identity to help position this program as an international initiative that other groups are welcome to join. The new imprint brand will have a strong endorsement from our selected publisher partner, and be further endorsed by supporting member groups and institutions.

1.9 Staffing

We are interested in exploring two possible scenarios:

- A) We employ our own staff at our own cost, working remotely or via office-space provided by member institutions – likely a Publishing Director in the first year, with two further Acquisitions Editors following in years two and three. In addition, we would propose employing part-time dedicated marketing assistance to supplement the marketing support offered by our publisher, with responsibility for marketing Lever Press publications, promoting the Lever Press brand and expanding our partnerships.
- B) We would staff this program through our publisher partner, who would identify or appoint roles that might work exclusively or semi-exclusively on our program.

In both scenarios, we intend to leverage the relationships we have with our institutions and faculty to build an extended network of enthusiastic and well-connected volunteers to help us identify and commission the best possible material and promote it effectively after publication.

Please provide your comments on these two options and your recommended staffing levels and costs associated with B, if this is an approach you can support.

1.10 Governance

We envisage that the Press will have a simple governance structure to facilitate rapid decision-making and transparency. We would propose appointing a Governing Council of academic advisors, which should include the Lever Press’s own Publishing Director and a representative from our publishing partner. As far as possible there will be a match with the branches of scholarship in which the Press intends to publish. Council members will have a very good acquaintance with the fields in which the Press wishes to be active. The Council should be a

minimum of 9 people and a maximum of say 15. A Chair will be selected by the Council, to serve for a period of 5 years, expandable for a maximum of two terms (i.e. 10 years), The role of the Council will be to oversee the implementation of the planned venture, and especially to work closely with the editors/Publishing Director, to ensure adherence to quality standards; to monitor budgets; and to have veto over publication of manuscripts (but such veto to be used only in accordance with procedures, which would be agreed). This group would not have day-to-day responsibilities for or oversight of editorial work. The Council will meet physically or virtually, four times a year.

There will also be an in-house Editorial Committee, which will meet regularly to discuss, review and agree which proposals should go forward to Governing Council. This team will comprise the Publishing Director, Acquisitions Editors, marketing staff and a representative from the publishing partner.

2 SELECTING A PUBLISHER PARTNER

2.1 Overview

We will partner with an existing Press with a commitment to integrating Open Access into their program together with the capabilities to offer the highest production standards, online hosting, the ability to innovate with new digital forms of scholarship, marketing, distribution and preservation.

Rather than a supplier-customer relationship, we wish to form a true partnership with a like-minded Press who can demonstrate a shared commitment to innovation and scholarship. In return, we will share editorial control, and the Publisher partner will have seat on our in-house editorial committee and Governing Council. We are particularly interested in working with a partner who can demonstrate a broader interest in, and commitment to, alternative models of publishing that support an enhanced readers and author experience and wider dissemination of knowledge.

2.2 Services to be provided

Our Press partner will manage copy-editing, typesetting, production, permissions/other legal, rights management, hosting, archiving, distribution and marketing (the latter complementing our own more focused in-house activities). They may also assist with reviewing and multimedia production. As outlined in section 1.9, we are also interested in options whereby our partner publisher would also manage the acquisition and peer review process with in-house staff dedicated (or part-dedicated) to this program.

3 REQUESTS FOR PROPOSALS

3.1 RFP process

We have circulated this RFP document to a small group of potential publisher partners with whom we have already had some early discussions and have indicated an interest in possibly working with us on this program. As stated earlier in section 2.1, we have developed an outline program as laid out in this document, but would certainly want to refine and fully develop this with our selected partner. This RFP process is designed to help us identify a preferred partner and gather sufficient financial information to build a business plan. The business plan and partner recommendation will be submitted to The Oberlin Group in early January. At that stage a commitment to funds will be sought and once this is secured we envisage a second phase whereby we will develop a more detailed proposal and final business plan, before launching our venture in the spring of 2015.

Once we have received publisher responses (due date is 1st December 2014) we will select a short-list for a one-hour web-based presentation and discussion in the week commencing 15th December. Library Directors from across the Oberlin Group will be invited to attend this, with questions managed through the Task Force and the overall process facilitated by Melinda Kenneway.

3.2 RFP requirements

Questions should be submitted **by 24th November** to Melinda Kenneway by email: Melinda.Kenneway@tbcommunications.com. Proposals should also be submitted to Melinda by email by end of the day on **1st December**.

An indicative timetable for this process is as follows:

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| Questions submitted by: | 24 ^h November 2014 |
| RFP responses received by: | 1 st December 2014 |
| Webex presentations made: | w/c 15 th December 2014 |
| Evaluation completed: | End January 2015 |
| Next stage applicants notified: | End January 2015 |
| Further discussions with partner/s | February 2015 |
| Partner selected | March 2015 |
| Publishing venture established | April 2015 |

Please provide the following information in your response:

1. Information on your organization, its capabilities and areas of speciality. Please highlight in particular your experience relating to monograph publishing, Open Access, innovative forms of publishing (formats and process) and publishing on behalf of partners. Please supply details of current publisher partnerships.

2. An outline of how you might support our program – what services would you provide, what formats would you recommend we publish in, what is your recommended business model, how would you suggest we staff our program, how might we combine our mission of Open Access publishing with a progressive approach to harnessing the potential of new technologies, how would you recommend we brand our initiative, how can you help ensure we attract readers and build on revenue opportunities?
3. An overview of why you are interested in partnering with The Oberlin Group, and why you are a good fit for supporting us in this venture.
4. Your expectations from this partnership – how would we work together, what level of funding over what time period would be required, what form of contractual relationship to you envisage and what level of involvement do you envisage having in editorial and other strategic and operational decisions?
5. A high level financial plan showing costs and revenues over a five-year period. Please model the financial impact of different options where you are proposing those. Costs should be based on publishing the following (assume average publication extent of 320pp):

Year 1: 5 books (one special ‘digital innovation’ project)

Year 2: 10 books (two special ‘digital innovation’ projects)

Year 3: 15 books (three special ‘digital innovation’ projects)

Year 4: 25 books (five special ‘digital innovation’ projects)

Year 5: 50 books (ten special ‘digital innovation’ projects)

In the scenario whereby the Lever Press is covering staff costs (as outlined under scenario A in section 1.9), please assume the following staff costs:

Year 1: staff: \$94,000

Year 2: staff: \$188,000

Year 3: staff: \$269,000

Year 4: staff: \$281,000

Year 5: staff: \$281,000

3.3 Evaluation criteria

Evaluation criteria will be circulated to all Oberlin Group members attending the webex presentations planned for early December. Input will be sought after those presentations, and the Task Force will review this feedback and identify the publisher or publishers that it considers best satisfy the evaluation criteria. Possible site visits and face-to-face discussions may be held thereafter to assist in a final decision.

Key evaluation criteria include:

- Financial stability and capacity
- Ability to support this program

- Demonstration of a shared vision for innovation to improve scholarly communications
- A brand that lends prestige and credibility to ours
- A commitment to Open Access as an alternative form of publishing
- A commitment to quality throughout the publishing process
- Experience of providing publishing services to third party partners
- Experience with new models and formats of publishing
- Strong demonstration of collaborative approach to partnerships
- Experience with monograph publishing in the arts and humanities
- Strong marketing and distribution capabilities