



The Cost to Publish TOME Monographs

A Preliminary Report

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I. Introduction

The [TOME \(Toward an Open Monograph Ecosystem\)](#) project launched in 2017 as a five-year pilot to test a cooperative model for university presses and higher education institutions to support Open Access (OA) monographs and develop more sustainable monographic publishing funding channels. Participating higher education institutions committed to provide grants of at least \$15,000 per monograph to support publications of their faculty; participating university presses committed to producing digital OA editions of TOME-supported volumes, openly licensing them under Creative Commons licenses, and depositing the files in selected open repositories or platforms.

The pilot was the result of several years of discussion among three partner organizations: the Association of American Universities (AAU), Association of Research Libraries (ARL), and Association of University Presses (AUPresses). University-based publishing, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, was feeling the pinch of both institutional budgets, strained in the wake of the economic downturn of 2007-2009, and declining library purchases of HSS monographs. Other possible sales channels—to individuals, or for course adoption—might bridge the gap for some scholarly monographs, but not most. At the same time, interest in new forms of digital publication and growing support for the mission of OA publishing led the three organizations to explore a pilot that would test an innovative funding model for book publishing, one that carried the potential to increase the value and impact of HSS faculty monographs through OA publication.

As the TOME pilot continued to take shape, it became clear that the aims of the project were not only to “ensure the long-term economic viability of foundational scholarly monographic publishing, while promoting the emergence of innovative digital models”¹ but also to “advance the wide digital dissemination of scholarship by humanities and humanistic social sciences faculty members.”²

The \$15,000 publishing grant established for the TOME pilot is best understood as a compromise among diverse viewpoints as to how to best reach those expected benefits. One key body of evidence that informed the minimum grant amount was the 2015 Mellon-funded Ithaka S+R Costs of Publishing Monographs project, which explored in great detail the areas of work and categories of cost required to produce and disseminate the “first digital copy” of a high-quality, peer-reviewed scholarly monograph.³

That study included 382 monographs from 20 publishers and outlined several definitions of cost, from a bare-bones (or “basic”) cost of publishing, including only staff time and directly captured expenses, to a “full cost” of publishing, which also included departmental and institutional overheads (general and administrative, or “G&A”). The study sample intentionally included a wide range of monographs, both those that publishers considered simple to produce, and those considered complex and costly. In this study, the average “basic” cost was \$28,747 and the “full” cost including overheads came to \$39,892. Of the 382 titles studied, fewer than 5% had full costs lower than \$20,000 and the least costly book studied came in with full costs of \$15,140.⁴

1 “Prospectus for an Institutionally Funded First-book Subvention,” June 2014, 1. Based on “A Rational System for Funding Scholarly Monographs,” a white paper prepared for the AAU-ARL Task Force on Scholarly Communications in November 2012 by Raym Crow.

2 From the final invitation to participate, “AAU/ARL/AAUP Subvention-funded Digital Monograph Publishing Initiative. 2017, shared by AUPresses.

3 Nancy L. Maron, Christine Mulhern, Daniel Rossman, Kimberly Schmelzinger, “The Costs of Publishing Monographs: Toward a Transparent Methodology,” (Ithaka 2016), <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.276785>.

4 Maron, et al., p.33.

Scholarly publishers had recently begun testing OA monograph models and announcing fees, as well.⁵ The fees being announced for OA were well under the average full or basic costs established by the Ithaka report. However, with an understanding that presses also would be able, and in most cases would wish, to publish and sell print or other for-sale editions to recoup total costs, these three communities believed that \$15,000—similar to several other OA program fees at the time—would be an acceptable number to pilot.⁶

This baseline of \$15,000 has been generally accepted among the scholarly publishers and universities participating in the TOME pilot, but not without question. There is no overwhelming agreement that this is the “right” number. Indeed, determining whether it is the right number is entirely dependent on the answer to the threshold question “The right number for what?” Should the fee to make a monograph open be a reasonable partial revenue replacement, or should the number be such as to sustain the operations of university-owned, professionally staffed, editorially rigorous scholarly publisher by covering true publishing costs?

These questions are still being answered. Since 2017, new OA programs have introduced even lower fees that seek to cover just a portion of the full costs of publishing a monograph as measured by the Ithaka report. Innovative production models and increased standardization in digital production and distribution point to new potential cost efficiencies. On the other hand, costs of delivering high-quality scholarly content in digital formats that are user-friendly, widely accessible and discoverable, have not decreased. This report begins to indicate some areas where costs in the future might well increase.

A full assessment of the TOME pilot—its goals, criteria, and results—will need to tackle the tensions between the benefits that are sought and the systemic support that is possible. Many interdependent elements will need to be understood in detail, including: what did it cost to publish books in the pilot? How and from where did institutions find funds to allocate for TOME faculty awards? How likely is this institutional support to continue, or even increase over time? How does publishing OA editions affect overall book publishing program revenues over time?

As TOME enters its final year of funding, AUPresses engaged Nancy Maron and Kim Schmelzinger, co-authors of the original *Costs of Publishing Monographs* study, to conduct a study of the first of these questions: the actual costs incurred by presses participating in the TOME project.

This new study, conducted in September and October 2021, examines to what extent the \$15,000 fee covers the costs of the monographs published in the TOME pilot, illustrates how partner presses describe the similarities and differences between publishing OA and non-OA monographs, and begins to capture the value the presses perceive in publishing OA books—specifically, in publishing OA books in the TOME program.

To produce the 2016 Ithaka report, Maron and Schmelzinger conducted multiple interviews with each press, producing data that was normalized across all presses and all categories of work. Given time constraints surrounding the current study, the authors provided guidelines to reporting presses and chose to accept all reported data in the form it was reported. This means that this report shares “averages” by the broad categories of publishing activity, and there is a great deal of variety in what is included in those categories from press to press. Although questionnaires and interviews were

5 Among the fees cited in the 2016 report were UCP’s Luminos (\$15,000); Palgrave Open (\$17,000); and both Routledge and Taylor and Francis (£10,000, approximately \$13,500 in 2016), p.9.

6 The figure of \$15,000 was intended to be a minimum funding level; this has not always been the case in practice.

conducted with press directors and staff in 2021, they were intended to round out the story behind the numbers for each press, rather than to validate or refine specific data points. Caveats regarding specific inconsistencies in different cost categories are expanded in each related section of this report.

This study should not be considered a definitive re-assessment of the costs of OA monograph publishing, but as the first step in a comprehensive evaluation of the TOME pilot, an exploration of costs incurred in publishing 57 of the TOME-funded monographs in today's market, providing insights into the uses and benefits of the current fee and the ways publishers today understand the value and risk associated with this new financial model. This report is intended to provide a useful starting point for presses and their partners to reach a common understanding of the activities, costs, and risks associated with OA monograph publishing, so they can work together and build upon the TOME model to create a sustainable way to support the production of scholarly works, available to all who wish to read them.

II. Methodology

The study included both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis.

The authors developed an Excel-based template for use in a standardized data request. The categories of cost were identified as (1) acquisitions editorial (2) manuscript editorial (3) design and production (4) marketing and (5) overhead.⁷ Presses were asked to include all related costs—whether staff time, in-house, in-kind, or contracted work in each category. Based on insights gathered from the Ithaka study, the Excel workbook provided detailed lists of activities to include in each category, to provide a framework for understanding the data request and in a quest for general consistency in reporting. The aims were to offer a detailed description of the work involved in publishing a monograph, to see how that work is adapted or modified when creating a subsidized OA book, and to understand how well current the TOME baseline grant is supporting that work. The authors also conducted qualitative interviews with publishers, to elicit more subjective information about their experience publishing TOME-funded titles.

In all, 15 presses participated in some way, offering qualitative and quantitative data on a total of 57 titles published through the TOME program. In addition, representatives of 11 presses participated in interviews with the authors of the study.

The data gathered represent a wide variety of publisher practices in cost accounting, which can make direct comparisons difficult:

- Some presses have a well-established method for allocating staff time “per book.”
- Some presses have in-house staff working in key activities; others make use of contract labor.
- All presses have some sort of “overhead” calculation, but there are very different ways that presses determine what the per-book allocation should be (e.g., in some cases, presses included some editorial staff time in “overhead”).

It should also be noted that presses reported on different numbers of titles, introducing the possibility that if their data was skewed it could more heavily influence the averages reported. And the titles in the sample were published at different times: those published more recently have not had as much time to generate sales data as those published earlier.

⁷ University Presses have very different ways of understanding what are considered “general and administrative” costs (G&A/overheads). The Ithaka “Cost of Publishing Monographs” report offers a detailed discussion of the variety of costs presses tend to include, as well as a range of methods for allocating those costs across the titles they publish.

For these reasons, this data should not be considered definitive concerning the costs related to any single category. As will be pointed out throughout the discussion, the value of the current study is to provide approximate data that can inform assessments of whether or not the \$15,000 fee typically covers the costs of publishing an OA monograph, and to feed into a more nuanced and longer-term review of TOME. This study of costs was valuable in helping to surface key issues and may help refine a methodology for future research. This study also begins to shine a light on publishers' experiences in undertaking OA publishing within the TOME framework.

III. Costs of Publishing Activities

When asked about potential differences in activities and costs required to publish these OA monographs compared to print counterparts, most publishers were quick to emphasize the similarities, not the differences, as reassurance that they did not see OA publishing as a way to invest less effort.

Despite many statements to the effect of "we don't do anything differently," it became clear that the act of publishing an OA monograph does involve some significant changes in the activities the press must undertake, and therefore in the costs they incur. While the full costs of publishing a high quality digital scholarly monograph (deliberately excluding any costs to manufacture or distribute print copies) are captured in the Ithaka report, the full costs of OA book publishing have yet to be defined and measured.⁸ The sections that follow share the average, minimum, and maximum costs per title in each area as reported by the presses, as well as some further detail concerning ways in which TOME-funded OA monograph publishing workflow and activities were noted as being different from the work needed to publish priced books.

Of the 57 books publishers reported on in the study, the average total cost was \$19,954.⁹

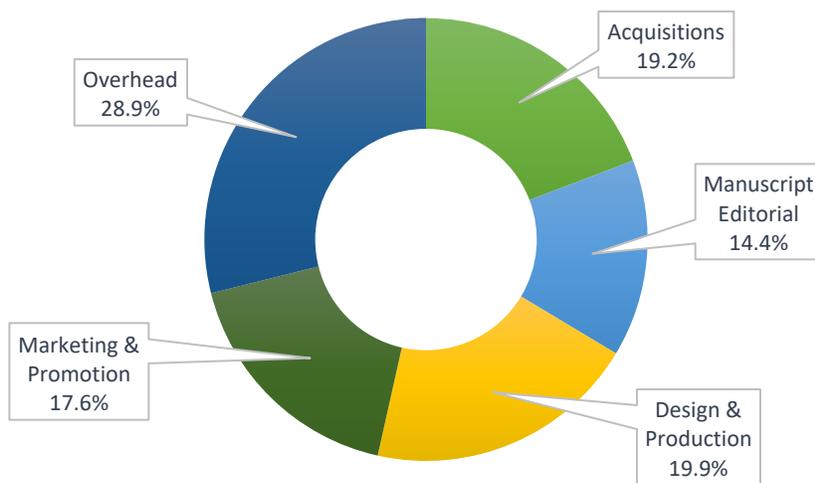


Fig. 1 Average Total Cost per title, by functional area

⁸ In this pilot, publishers anticipated creating both digital and print editions. It is worth noting that costs to the publishers who undertake digital-only publications could be different, as well.

⁹ Readers will note that elsewhere in the report, charts that address average costs per activity illustrate a "total cost" that is just slightly higher. This is because the report examines publishing total Costs through two different lenses: the average of total costs across presses, and the average of costs across activities, which in some cases are summed. Mathematically these approaches differ, and this results in slightly different totals.

A. Acquisitions Costs

Of the 57 titles in the sample, 52 included costs for acquisitions; the average cost of the 52 titles was \$3,931, as seen in the table below.¹⁰ Some presses cited extremely low figures for acquisition-related work (the minimum cited was \$175), which is unusual, as the Ithaka report demonstrated that acquisition tended to be the most expensive category of work.¹¹ Publisher interviews helped to explain this. In some cases, the press chose to include their allocation for acquisitions in the “overhead” column. In other cases, they only included peer review honoraria, which tended to be a few hundred dollars. When those exceptionally low figures are removed from the sample, the average of the 44 titles that remain jumps up to \$4,568.

Acquisitions Costs	
Minimum	\$175
Average	\$3,931
Maximum	\$7,412
NOBS	52
DNR	5

Fig. 2 Acquisitions Costs

B. Manuscript Editorial Costs

Publishers reported few if any changes to workflow or cost concerning manuscript editorial work. Several noted this as a point of pride—that no changes (meaning, specifically, shortcuts) were applied in creating TOME books. Publisher representatives were clear in stating that OA books receive the same treatment as other monographs on their list. Rather, presses noted that there are some additional costs involved in supporting OA publication. Beyond simply choosing to make the books OA, publishers also must prepare appropriate licensing and funding metadata, prepare books for inclusion on OA platforms such as institutional repositories, Manifold, Ubiquity, Fulcrum, OAPEN/DOAB, JSTOR, and/or MUSE; and pay the per-title fees associated with those platforms.¹²

Manuscript Editorial Costs	
Minimum	\$679
Average	\$2,950
Maximum	\$7,459
NOBS	57
DNR	0

Fig. 3 Manuscript Editorial Costs

¹⁰ In this and subsequent tables, NOBS refers to Number of Observations, and DNR means Did Not Report.

¹¹ Maron, et al., p. 21.

¹² Creation and distribution of title metadata can fall to different functional departments. Costs may appear in manuscript editorial, or marketing, or even acquisitions depending on how a press staffs these responsibilities.

C. Design & Production Costs

While publishers again stated that there were few if any differences between priced and OA editions in terms of labor and cost of design and production, they did note that highly complex books are significantly more costly to produce, so would likely not have been considered for TOME. As one publisher noted, “if there was a complicated, highly visual book, this would likely preclude it from TOME due to the potential high cost to produce. A full-color book would also likely fall into this category.”

Design & Production Costs	
Minimum	\$300
Average	\$4,090
Maximum	\$8,722
NOBS	55
DNR	2

Fig. 4 Design and Production Costs

D. Marketing & Promotion Costs

With marketing and promotion, respondents again often noted that the process and investment was very similar to that of any monograph on their list. All directors interviewed mentioned that the work of promotion itself is the same for all scholarly titles, regardless of whether they are being offered OA.

- “There are no significant differences. We still promote the print formats of OA books in the same way as for non-OA books.”
- “There is no change in the marketing process—again, we treat all our monographs equally regardless of them being OA or not.”
- “The process was very similar to other scholarly books.”
- “The only difference is that we mention the availability of the OA edition in all our publicity, and we’ve added links to the OA edition to the book pages on our website. We’re getting DOIs for our OA books but not for other ebooks.”

Several presses cited metadata as a particularly thorny issue for OA editions: “more challenging than we expected.” Specifically, making sure that the TOME books are properly listed in all distribution outlets is currently a problem. One press respondent noted that pricing books at “\$0” posed metadata challenges, as some book distribution partners do not easily recognize the zero-price editions. Other publishers cited such metadata challenges—some described below—as taking substantial staff time and effort to investigate and resolve. There may be additional hidden or unreported costs lurking in this arena.

Publishers described a range of approaches to promoting the availability of an OA edition:

- “We mention it in the first and last lines of the copy and include the DOI. We’ve sometimes had to follow up with other platforms too to get the books properly listed as OA.”
- “We highlighted the TOME initiative [and funding institution] and included a link to the OA edition in our social media and email announcements, in addition to our website. We were able to offer the OA edition to scholars interested in reviewing the book for journals or course use; for a book intended to recoup costs through sales, we would have sent print copies only.”

- “We make additional efforts to spread the word about the OA editions of TOME books through [a platform’s social media], but this does not substantially affect the costs or process.”

While some directors felt there was no change in cost, many directors recognized that there was some additional expense to making these modifications, including:

- “We still have to make a change to our website, which will involve a small cost, to add a more visible OA link to the book pages. The website was created by an outside vendor who will do this in the next stage of a development process that has been delayed by unrelated issues. The current link is a bit hidden...but to make up for that, we mention the OA edition prominently in the copy so people can’t miss it.”
- “[M]arketing is the same for any monograph. The process and workflow for getting the book live on multiple platforms that are not our own is the difference. There is more work involved from that perspective.”
- “Another diversion in workflow, this time involving metadata.”
- “Differences included navigating OA metadata on platforms like JSTOR and MUSE, as well as loading the final PDFs to our institutional repository.”
- “Needed to ensure distribution via OA channels via an OA platform. These generated higher costs that are NOT reflected in the book’s P&L or cost and revenue outlined in the chart. We did not capture these costs on the project.”

Marketing & Promotion Costs	
Minimum	\$426
Average	\$3,613
Maximum	\$8,960
NOBS	56
DNR	1

Fig. 5 Marketing & Promotion Costs

E. Overhead Costs

In addition to these functional areas, presses were also asked to report on “overhead,” and this is a significant area where more research or data normalization is needed to capture how presses are accounting for the costs of publishing these books. As the original Ithaka report noted, “overhead” at the press level can include everything from the cost of office space to the costs associated with leasing and managing title databases and websites. It should certainly be noted that the press of a university located in a high-rent, high-salary metropolitan area may carry higher overhead for the same cost categories.

The fundamental shift from selling books to accepting fees to produce them also impacts publishers’ accounting operations. Issues related to accepting and recognizing author-side fees or institutional fees or subsidies may impact back-office workflows disproportionately, depending on the size of the publisher and the scope of their OA work.¹³

Finally, legacy systems for allocating overheads on a per-title basis may need to be revised. Some

¹³ According to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), publishers are not permitted to recognize revenue until a book is published. (This is currently the case for journal publishers receiving APCs prior to article publication; the publishers must consider these author-side fees as deferred revenue.) This creates manual workarounds unless publishers

presses assign overhead costs evenly across all titles to share the “burden” of these press-wide costs. Others allocate a share of those overhead expenses to titles based on the revenue those titles have generated. This can result in an extremely high “overhead” allocation for OA books that end up with substantial sales in other editions. The wide range of overhead values reported can be seen in Figure 7.

A last note on method: in the present study, publishers occasionally included functional staff time (e.g., for acquisitions or marketing) under “overhead,” rather than share per-title cost data by activity; this might mean that cost of those activities would be higher than reported here. Future refinement of this data would require post-collection data normalization to make certain that publishers are reporting expenses consistently in this category.

Overhead Costs	
Minimum	\$1,518
Average	\$5,923
Maximum	\$22,968
NOBS	57
DNR	0

Fig. 6 Overhead Cost

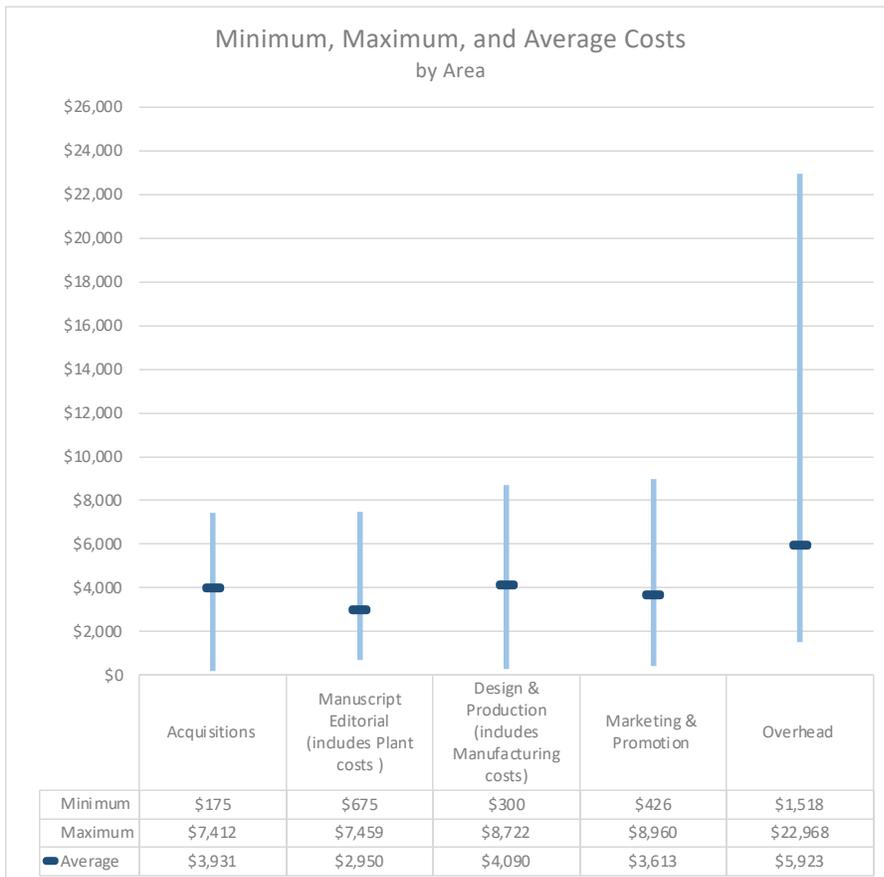


Fig. 7 Costs by Functional Area, Showing Overhead, Minimum, Maximum, and Average

choose to overlook these accounting idiosyncrasies.

IV. Assessing TOME Publishing Costs in Context

A. Electing TOME Participation

When asked what criteria guided their choice of titles to publish via TOME, respondents shared a range of approaches for seeking and choosing to pursue TOME funding. All publishers clearly stated that the availability of TOME funding did not “impact the decision to publish.”

Among the reasons for and approaches to pursuing TOME funding were:

- “Market potential. We estimated whether we could still generate enough sales in an OA context to offset the loss of revenue.”
- “Was TOME funding available through the author’s institution? That’s it. If the institution offered it, we strongly encouraged our author to apply. It did not impact our decision to publish or the direction of the list.”
- “We seek subventions for most of our academic titles, whether traditionally published or OA. In most cases we will work with the author to pursue a TOME application if it is a possibility, unless the book has especially strong sales potential or if the author is resistant to OA.”
- “Editors applied for any (titles) by authors at schools that were participating. For a standard scholarly book, that level of funding always seemed worth it.”
- “We look at the book’s audience, market size, institutional affiliation, and the author’s view of OA.”

Most respondents also reported that actively pursuing author-side subventions to support the costs of publishing is a common activity for all publications, and not just for OA titles. While some presses actively encouraged editors to become aware of which authors were at TOME-supported institutions, others described a more reactive approach: “we participate at the request of authors.”

The exceptions? Books with complex production requirements—due to length, language, technical equations, or artwork—have already been mentioned as titles that may not be included in a program funded like TOME. In addition, when respondents did mention excluding titles from the pilot, it was often due to a concern that this would jeopardize potentially significant revenue opportunities. As one noted, “we’d have hesitated for anything with wide trade appeal or where we expected extensive course use.” Titles like these are often the core of a publisher’s backlist, which is usually a significant source of operating funds for university presses. The impact of OA book publishing on long-term press operations—whether the effect on print and backlist sales over time is negative, positive, or neither—remains an area where research and modeling is needed.

B. The Role of Revenue in Open Access Publishing

Sales have long been considered a vital part of a publisher’s sustainability model. Scholarly monographs—written by and for a scholarly audience—do not often generate enough in sales to cover the costs of their creation, even when there is no competition in the form of an OA edition in the market. University presses with significant monograph publication programs have come to rely on a range of other funding streams, including institutional budget allocations, other title subventions, backlist sales, other publishing lines (e.g., textbooks, journals, regional titles), and publishing services (e.g., distribution, sales representation) to offset those losses.

While the TOME program is focused on the production of OA monographs, publishers reported that sales revenue remains an important factor in making sure that books reach break-even. In order

for most presses in the study to reach break-even with the current \$15,000 award, they are relying on revenue generated from sales of all editions of the book to fill the gap. The university presses in the TOME pilot all had some version of the book for sale—in print (hardcover and/or paperback) or possibly as a direct-to-consumer ebook (e.g., Kindle).

For the books reported on, cumulative average revenue to-date for priced ebooks, hardcovers, and paperbacks was \$8,199, with a low of \$1,529 and a high of \$40,521.¹⁴

Version	# presses offering this version	average revenue	average units sold
Priced eBook	38	\$1,556	41
Cloth	47	\$2,716	53
Paper	52	\$5,365	342

While this study captured available revenue and unit sales information for TOME titles, it does not constitute a final report on sales performance. The titles studied have been selling for different lengths of time, affecting comparable lifetime sales numbers. The sales data for all titles comprises three or fewer years, so the numbers will likely continue to increase—albeit at a slower rate—as the editions continue to sell.

Today, these sales figures are seen as vital to the publisher’s ability to fully cover the costs of publication. They are a part of the “portfolio” of funding—along with the TOME-supplied fee—needed to cover costs for creating an academic OA monograph. However, certain conditions suggest that these revenue figures may be subject to change—specifically to decrease—over time.

Average Total Revenue: \$9,637



Fig. 8 Average Total Revenue

¹⁴ The study does not take into account additional sources of revenue attached to the book, such as subrights or licensing arrangements. An unpublished study from the Association of University Presses puts the income from such activities at about 7% of an average book’s sales. That said, general interest titles are more likely to have licensing potential than are scholarly monographs.

C. Reaching Break-Even

For most OA monographs in the TOME Pilot, the \$15,000 fee did not cover the costs of producing them. Break-even for most—but not all—was reached only once sales were generated post-publication (see Figure 9, below). Titles in the study included those that had been published from a few months before up to three years earlier. While this study did not take sales growth over time into account, generally speaking, the highest-selling titles (both in units and in dollars) were those in the market longest. In other words, it appears that the current fee of \$15,000 does not fully cover the costs of creating and distributing OA monographs; for now, publishers are counting on post-publication sales to bridge that gap.

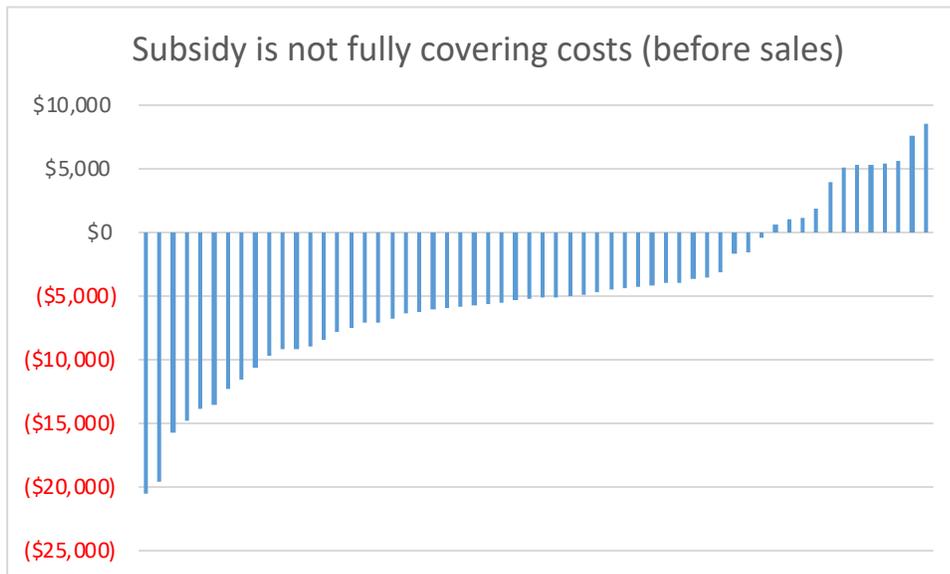


Fig. 9 Net costs after TOME subsidy (before sales)

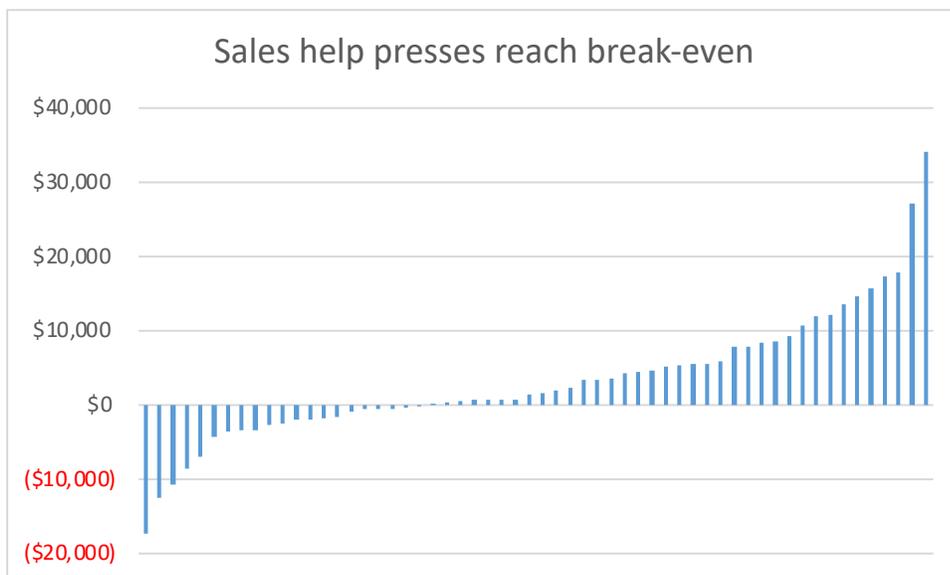


Fig. 10 Net Proceeds after TOME subsidy and sales

Cost vs. Revenue

With and Without Subsidy

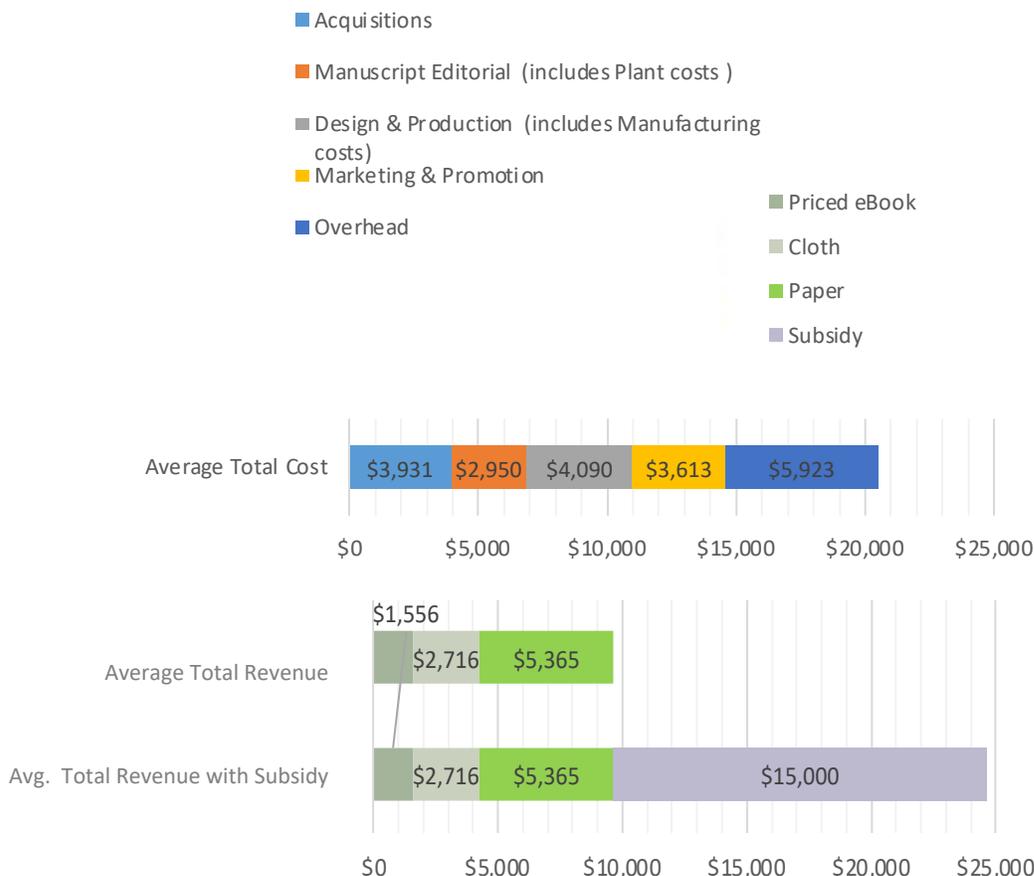


Fig. 11 Reaching Break-even?

D. Future Risks to Revenue

While this study establishes the importance of sales revenue in bridging the gap between the current \$15,000 baseline grant and the cost of publishing these monographs, it would be premature to develop projections that assume that even these low revenue figures will hold years into the future.

Here are a few risks to future revenue that emerged through interviews with press respondents:

- Some publishers described what sounds like a current state of information asymmetry between presses that publish OA titles and the distributors and customers who purchase priced books. One interviewee suggested that some ebook distributors list, promote, and sell the priced book, but may not be as quick to list (or make as readily discoverable) the OA version. As systems evolve (or potential consumers become aware of the wealth of OA editions available), sales could further decline.¹⁵

¹⁵ Among the distributors where this appears to be the case are YBP's approval plans, EBSCO GOBI, and ProQuest OASIS, where, as of this writing, it is not always clear that there is an OA version available. Providers have begun to address this.

- Some US-based publishers have begun to notice that offering a freely available digital copy in English can dampen interest in foreign distribution deals, which may impact both revenue offsets and author needs. As one noted, “In one case, an author was interested in OA but only if we could also find a South Asian publisher for her book. Some publishers were deterred but happily, we were able to find two who weren’t, and the funding provided by TOME made it possible for us to offer them favorable terms.”
- As more frontlist titles are published with an OA edition freely available, the backlist will eventually include more titles with open editions, which may result in lower sales of backlist titles over time. This has broader implications for the health of the publishing enterprise (not just one title’s profitability), as backlist titles can be a major contributor to publisher revenue for many years after publication.

E. How Does the \$15,000 Measure Up?

Of the 57 books that publishers reported on in the study, the average cost was \$19,954, with a low of \$6,495 and a high of \$35,547. Further investigation of the titles with the highest total cost revealed that many of these belonged to presses who applied overhead in proportion to sales; this tended to increase those allocations as sales of print editions went up. That said, removing these “outliers” had a negligible impact on the averages.

Most books in the study—46 of the 57—cost more than \$15,000 to publish and there are reasons to believe that these costs will rise over time. Publisher interviews surfaced reporting gaps and additional areas where costs may emerge in the near future:

- Publishers reporting the lowest total costs may not be including some important categories. Some categories may not be fully included in data reported to this study, including marketing, or cost for the additional work (time) needed to develop, correct, or otherwise manage metadata and new relationships with existing vendors, so that OA monographs are fully populating distribution channels.
- New activities will be needed to make the books available and discoverable to readers worldwide. While not specific to OA initiatives, the work of making digital monographs fully accessible is likely to be an important and costly new set of activities in the years ahead.¹⁶
- Long-term hosting, discovery, and preservation. The responsibility for long-term hosting and preservation of OA monographs is unclear.
- Loss of sales. Some press directors describe the TOME subsidy as a way to offset “loss of sales”—specifically, the sales they typically depend on to earn back some of the expense of having produced the book. OA edition availability on print sales is not yet fully understood—such as whether increased discoverability is favorable to print sales, whether backlist sales will be affected over time, and whether subsidiary rights opportunities (such as licensed foreign editions) are impacted.

¹⁶ Accessibility features were not requirements for the OA digital editions produced under the TOME pilot; however, the need to address accessibility in digital books is much clearer in today’s more mature ebook market. Developing and implementing those workflows will incur increased costs at the point a publisher embraces this imperative. One press used the program as an opportunity to develop the capacity for producing accessible digital book files and called it “an extremely important fringe benefit of our participation in the TOME initiative.” Future research into the actual costs of OA monograph production and distribution could reveal whether accessibility requirements incur one-time implementation costs or will have higher ongoing costs to maintain quality accessibility standards.

Overall, the most common characterization from presses was that the current TOME baseline grant “helps us defray some but not all costs.” This distinction between “covering total cost” and “mitigating risk sufficiently” was an important theme raised by publishers, some of whom noted that other potential sources of support for OA funding—such as from an author’s department, or research grant, or from some other source on campus—were significantly lower. Without being able to sufficiently mitigate the financial risk of publishing a title OA, some publishers will not choose that route to publication.

V. Concluding Reflections

A. Value of Open Access to Publishers

Until recently, the most obvious measure of the success of a given title might be in copies sold and revenue generated. Awards won or attention garnered are important in both OA and non-OA monograph publishing, but the value of such impact can be less easy to measure and to communicate without the proxy of sales. Publishers expressed a variety of perspectives on the value of pursuing OA publishing opportunities to them, beyond these usual metrics.

While the function of this particular study was not to capture impact (many books in the sample have only just been published, and many measures of impact have yet to be widely or consistently adopted), for several press directors increasing the potential reach of a monograph was a major perceived benefit. “Very popular books might show up in 10 countries [if only available for sale,] versus 60-80 countries when offered as OA,” said one. Others underlined the value of greater access and distribution for purposes of research: “When it comes to distribution for the research...OA makes a ton of sense.” Another noted, there is a huge benefit of “getting to readers” who otherwise would not find the books. Said one publisher, “I want to see the whole world have access to the info these scholars have gathered. And OA seems like the most efficient way.”

One press noted that the TOME baseline grant mitigated risk in taking on a specific title:

“The book is a bit unusual in its use of [one field] to consider [a different field...] While there was concern that this book would not find its audience, the innovative approach prompted significant interest and engagement from the peer reviewers. The TOME grant offered support that allowed us to publish this book and make it available to a wider scope of readers while also expanding our list and pushing our boundaries into new areas of exploration.”

Many of the publishers interviewed are participating in or are launching their own OA book programs or pilots. A range of motives drives the exploration of different OA models, including TOME: from support for the underlying principles of open access to the quest for sustainable publishing solutions, from evolving norms in various disciplines to opportunities for investment in accessible or innovative processes. Understanding the motivations for publishers undertaking OA publishing should be addressed in a full program assessment.

B. Aspects of Funder Relations

Future success of the TOME model, will also need to take into account the motivations of and benefits to the institutional partners who are paying the publishing baseline grant. Though not part of this study design, the authors did begin to learn about two important aspects of the TOME model: where the funds are coming from, and variations on budgeting and reporting requirements from the participating universities. In some cases, the TOME baseline grant was supported by multiple units on campus, these included provosts' funds and libraries' budgets. Some university agreements required that the press submit a budget before funds were disbursed; others did not. Most, if not all, used the Mellon Foundation-funded Model Contract, an author-publisher contract focused on the publication of long-form digital scholarship.¹⁷

This led to a range of experiences, up to and including differing subsidy amounts being granted due to differing levels of institutional involvement. In one case, the publisher simply asked for production costs (around \$7,000); the university representative subsequently reminded them that editorial could also be included, so that was added back in. Another publisher, requesting the full amount of \$15,000, was asked by the institution if they could submit a budget to cover "only" the costs of producing the digital OA version, not the print edition.

Inconsistencies in the approach further highlight the differences in perceptions as to the amount of the subsidy and what that subsidy covers, as much as it casts light on the critical role of the university in funding TOME and future OA monograph models. Further exploration is needed to better understand who the stakeholders are on a campus, what motivates their participation in programs of this nature, and what their understanding is about what the subsidy could and should fund.

C. What Should a Fee Cover and Who Should Decide?

In interviews, some publishers described the \$15,000 baseline grant as a necessary, and in some cases the absolute minimum, condition for taking the risk of publishing a book that they felt would lose sales due to a freely available version. It is widely held that certain core activities—editorial, design, production, marketing—are all vital to the success of an OA monograph just as they are to for-sale editions, and these are areas in which costs are generally well-understood and valued across scholarly communication participants.

University presses also place a great deal of importance (and therefore time, hence, cost) on the act of acquiring new works of scholarship. This work, which involves carefully evaluating many more manuscripts than will ever be published, is considered by press directors to be a vital act of independent, trusted evaluation of scholarship, a service that university administrators—in particular, tenure and promotion committees—rely upon. By constantly seeking the best disciplinary work and expanding their networks, the acquiring editors ensure that new as well as established voices are heard. The developmental work many acquisitions editors engage in—essentially, the act of 'turning researchers into writers'—can be easily overlooked at quota-based publishers, and intentionally leaner publishing operations. These areas of work require significant amounts of time, from highly skilled practitioners. Presses and their authors feel this is very important to the very nature of their work. Do university stakeholders agree, and will they choose to pay for it?

17 The Model Publishing Contract for Digital Scholarship: <https://www.modelpublishingcontract.org/>

Many publishers were very clear, as well, in their belief that OA book programs must take into consideration creating a print book—one that may be sold. “This is a part of serving authors,” noted one press director. “If we had to tell authors no display version and not in bookstores, they would say, ‘I don’t want that.’” Another pointed out, “If we were to tell authors ‘we’ll publish it OA but with no print component,’ they would not agree to do it... They need the print copy for tenure and promotion.” Another noted that “even if authors are OA evangelists, they still want a copy of the book.”

Finally, there are some system-wide issues that still need to be addressed for a program like TOME to scale, and some real risks to consider in moving forward with a TOME-style OA model that does not fully fund the costs of publication.

1. There are inequities in the TOME model, or any model that relies upon institutions underwriting the costs of publication fees. Fee-based models funded by universities disadvantage authors at less well-resourced institutions, or independent scholars without institutional affiliations.
2. There are risks associated with this model, if not fully funded. If the fee does not cover all losses for a publisher, they may choose to invest less effort in publication, promotion and distribution, or simply to limit the number of monographs they make available OA.
3. An OA model that provides a fee for the primary publisher but does not take into account the full value chain of distribution risks inadvertently reducing the likelihood for broad reach and impact in regions around the globe. International publishers and distributors who depend on being able to sell a book in their regions may be cautious when a freely available English language book exists.

The figure of \$15,000 is far from being a guaranteed minimum fee. That number is not always accepted without question, is sometimes reduced, and the total number of institutions willing to pay it is at this point unknown. As pressures on that figure occur in one direction from university administrators and different OA models, and potentially in another from increased cost demands of OA dissemination and digital production, further discussions aimed at forging mutual understanding and trust around the cost and value of OA publishing at university presses will be a vital step in creating a model that will be appealing to universities, publishers, and scholarly authors.

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We have endeavored to provide clarity and accuracy in our analysis and interpretation of the data, and appropriate context for the quotations of press participants. Any errors are the authors' own, as are the findings and conclusions reported herein.

Appendices

Appendix A: Data Gathering Template and FAQ

TOME FINANCIAL DATA GATHERING INSTRUCTIONS

Please complete ONE Excel sheet, using one row per title. Include only those titles published through the end of Fiscal Year 2020.

If you are unable to provide data on all titles in that timeframe, please report on as many as possible.

Below are general guidelines we hope will help you in completing the form. Because presses have different workflows and different accounting systems, there is a real risk of trying to compare apples to oranges! So we are not assuming that we will be able to make definitive statements about “average cost” for all presses. That said, we do think that the financial data, paired with qualitative responses will go a long way to helping us understand some effective practices and obstacles, as well as the range of approaches that presses are taking today.

FAQ

Which titles do I report on?

We'd love to see data from ALL of your titles in the program. That said, we understand this all takes time. Particularly for those presses with many titles in the program, please complete as many lines as you can in the time you have.

How detailed is the financial data we are providing?

We are asking for you to report on costs associated with 4 broad categories of activities:

- Acquisitions
- Manuscript Editorial
- Production/Design
- Marketing and Promotion

That's it! Below and in the workbook, we list lots of more specific areas of work (e.g., “proofreading”) but this is only to give you a sense of which activities we imagine are in each of those buckets. If you want to share it, great! But we are NOT asking you to share data on each of those individual activities.

Does that include both direct expenses (like paying a free-lancer) and our cost for staff time?

Yes! In the total, please include both direct expenses and (your estimate for) staff time devoted to that work.

What should we include in “Acquisitions”?

Note: We realize that acquisition effort was expended before the commitment to TOME, but if you do have an estimate for costs/time required to acquire the work, please include that.

- Author communication and support
- Conference attendance and campus visits
- Project development and editing
- Internal publication meetings

- Managing the peer review process
- Peer review and series editor honoraria

What should we include in “Manuscript Editorial”?

Include all costs for all activities involving manuscript editorial, such as:

- Author Communication and Support
- Copyediting
- Proofreading
- Developmental Editing
- Project Management
- Permissions Management
- Permissions Clearance Fees
- Identifier Fees
- Pre-processing
- Indexing
- Copyright Registration
- CIP/ Cataloguing
- MsEd Miscellaneous

What should we include in “Design & Production”?

Include all costs for all activities involving production and design, such as:

- Digital Asset Management
- Digital File Preparation
- File Conversion
- File Distribution
- File Preservation
- Production Miscellaneous
- Display Markup/ Composition
- Interior Design
- Illustration Preparation
- Supplemental Materials Preparation
- Cover Design
- Cover Permissions Fees
- Design Miscellaneous

What should we include in “Marketing & Promotion”?

Include all costs for all activities involving marketing and promotion, such as:

- Publicity (including Advertising)
- Copywriting
- Website
- Title-specific Web Marketing
- Marketing Conferences, Exhibits
- Discovery Metadata
- Reviews, Awards Admin.
- Award Entry Fees
- Review and Award Copies
- Marketing Direct Mail/ Email
- Email Campaigns
- Marketing Miscellaneous

Where do we report on “overhead”?

If your press factors in other INSTITUTIONAL OVERHEADS (e.g., office space, tech support, legal, etc.), include your per title estimate in the column provided and let us know what that encompasses for your press/what the figure is based on.

If we are using freelancers should I count my time spent managing them?

If this is a significant amount of time and you are able to come up with an estimate for time spent, please do include it.

If there are things that I do for all titles, what is the best way to allocate that time (or money) to just TOME titles?

We will leave it to YOU to tell US how you allocate costs across titles. Depending on the activity, some methods include dividing total cost by number of titles; or across the number of frontlist titles in that book’s season.

For Marketing, some titles received more time and attention; should I allocate “overhead” costs like inclusion in the seasonal catalog equally, or weighted according to how much attention the book received?

If a title in the TOME program had a special marketing campaign or exceptional costs related to marketing (or any category, for that matter), yes, absolutely include those costs! We are curious to know more about what the range of costs and activities looks like for books in this program.

How do we estimate labor costs for staff time, if we don’t track it by title?

We recommend asking the relevant staff involved in working on the title to come up with an estimate of how many hours they worked on the project. Then, using salary + benefits, estimate the approximate labor cost for work on that title.

For staff time, do we include fringe/benefits in the “labor” cost?

YES.

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Appendix B: Questions for Presses

TOME FINANCIAL DATA GATHERING

Questions to answer

General

- What other pre-publication-funded Open Access initiatives have you/are you participating in?

Acquisitions

- What criteria guided your choice of titles to publish via TOME?

Manuscript Editorial

- What criteria guided your choice of titles to publish via TOME?
- In what ways was the editorial process different (if at all) from the editorial process for a book intended to recoup costs through sales?
- Did these changes result in higher or lower costs anywhere? a shift in costs?

Design & Production

- In what ways was the production process different (if at all) from the process for a book intended to recoup costs through sales?
- Did these changes result in higher or lower costs anywhere? a shift in costs?

Marketing & Promotion

- In what ways was the marketing process different (if at all) from the process for a book intended to recoup costs through sales?
- Did these changes result in higher or lower costs anywhere? a shift in costs?

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