

Consultation

Best practice for Open Access usage metrics

Background

Libraries are under pressure to shift to OA while at the same time increase their reliance on data driven decision making. One key challenge is that the shift to open is decreasing library visibility over usage, both within their institutions (for all content) and globally (for content they have funded). This consultation aims to establish a framework of best practices for collecting and reporting usage data related to open access (OA) publications, building on existing inputs such as [Release 5.1](#) and the [OA friendly guide](#), to help address that challenge.

The impact of agentic and generative AI usage is out of scope: COUNTER has a separate [AI working group](#) tackling this issue.

Have your say

Our working group has put together a series of mechanisms to tackle different parts of the OA usage metrics challenge. Let us know how viable and valuable you think the options are by responding to the [consultation form](#). We'll be tracking all feedback into consideration as part of our revision and publication process.

Consultation

Challenge one: Global Reporting

OA materials are frequently accessed from outside of institutional authentication mechanisms, meaning usage cannot be tied to an institution. When paying for OA, libraries want to understand the global impact of the work, as well as or instead of the usage within their institution.

COUNTER already includes a mechanism for reporting global usage – that is, aggregate metrics for all COUNTER activity by all users worldwide, whether these are attributable to an institution or not. Global reports can already be broken down by country, state, and attribution status. Global reporting is not well understood and has been sparsely implemented to date.

Recommendation one: Appropriate global reporting.

We recommend offering Global Title Reports (GTR) where the journal or book operates a title-level business model like Subscribe to Open, SCOAP3, or Knowledge Unlatched. That is, libraries and other parties put money into a central pot to make entire titles openly available.

We recommend offering Global Item Reports (GIR) where the journal or book operates an item-level business model like APCs or Read and Publish, where content is made open at the level of the Item rather than the Title.

Recommendation two: Make the Global Item Report more usable

We recommend that any publisher offering GIR offer pre-filtered reports designed to reduce the size of the report and make it easier to work with:

- The simplest option is to pre-filter reports with their COUNTER Attributes
 - Access_Type: Open
 - YOP (year of publication)
 - Metric_Type: Unique_Item_Requests
 - Title
- More complex, but more useful pre-filtering would deliver a GIR restricted to items (articles) published by scholars affiliated with the institution calling the report (e.g. authored by their researchers, or paid for by the institution). See the later section on [Metadata](#) for details on how this could work. Note that COUNTER suspects few publishers would invest in this type of pre-filtering without strong demand from library customers.

Challenge two: Linking metadata

There is no current mechanism linking DOIs in COUNTER reports to a specific institution, making it difficult for publishers to report on usage of the content for which an institution has paid an OA fee (regardless of business model).

The Item Report, and therefore the GIR, includes article-level metadata such as DOI, and it allows for up to three author identifiers (e.g. ORCID, ISNI). There is no current mechanism to include more than three authors, and there are no fields for other persistent identifiers for author affiliations (e.g. institutional identifiers like ROR).

We know that some libraries would like to see payment information as part of the metadata. Note that COUNTER is not and is unlikely ever to recommend inclusion of payment information in usage reporting.

Recommendation three: Extension for institutional PIDs

We recommend adding a new Reserved Element to the Code, per [Section 11.5](#), with Element_Name Affiliation_ID. Data in this field should be a series of institutional PIDs (e.g. ROR, Ringgold, ISNI) for the authors' affiliations. The goal of this extension is to facilitate delivering a GIR restricted to items published by scholars affiliated with the institution calling the report, per Guideline two. Note that the addition of multiple PIDs, particularly in a tabular report, could result in a very long string of {namespace}:{value} pairs.

Future recommendation four: Align with NISO OA Business Processes

This NISO OA Business Processes working group (<https://www.niso.org/standards-committees/oabp>) has created a data dictionary and reporting standard for OA publications. Once that group publishes its revised report, COUNTER will assess opportunities to align our recommendations for making the GIR more useable in light of that work. We will also seek to create recommended extensions to the Code of Practice to highlight persistent identifiers (PIDs) and other metadata fields that will allow librarians and publishers to stitch together OA usage data with other information (e.g. payment).

Challenge three: Syndicated Usage

OA materials are frequently available on multiple platforms, meaning the publisher's reports will not provide a full picture of usage. COUNTER's existing [Syndicated Usage](#) guidelines identify safe, privacy-protective mechanisms for exchanging usage data between a syndication platform and the original publisher, as well as one-click mechanisms for filtering syndicated usage out of resulting COUNTER reports.

Recommendation five: Including syndicated usage

We recommend publishers include syndicated usage alongside on-platform usage in their reporting to show a fuller picture of the value of OA syndication.

Challenge four: Inclusion and Accessibility

Some OA publishers are very small and lack resources to make COUNTER reporting viable.

Recommendation six: Follow the Pathway

COUNTER's recently published [Pathway to Compliance](#) offers a route for small publishers, including those operating with volunteer labour or under sponsored ("diamond") models, to become COUNTER compliant without incurring very high costs associated with e.g. an audit.

Challenge five: Education

COUNTER is confusing! Alongside the eventual OA best practice, COUNTER will significantly revise and extend the [Friendly Guide to OA](#). The new guide will have more detail about things like why OA publishers will benefit from delivering normalised usage data to their customers, regardless of business model.

While not something that necessarily fits within the scope of work, there are some questions that COUNTER will address as part of the updated Guide:

- Why institutional usage can drop for customers who exclusively use a proxy IP (like OpenAthens or EZ Proxy), particularly under OA models where user authentication is optional.
- Reinforcing the need to [look at the Title Report](#) rather than the TR_J1 standard view, particularly when a journal is OA.

Future work

Global Reports

As part of a project budgeted for the second half of 2026, we will be updating the Registry to better reflect availability of global reports.

Metadata

COUNTER is mostly standalone data. We will investigate whether publishers can technically deliver usage metrics to services like the OA Switchboard or CCC's Rightslink, to facilitate easy library aggregation of usage metrics for content they pay to publish.

Inclusion and Accessibility

Even the Pathway may not be sufficient for the very smallest publishers. COUNTER has long aimed to build out a widget that could be embedded on publisher websites to facilitate Item-level global usage reporting. While we have yet to succeed in getting funding for this work, a possible outcome of this project could be a collaborative grant application.