

Call for Proposals

Fresh Momentum for Diamond Open Access



A call for proposals under the LIS funding programme

“Infrastructures for Scholarly Publishing”

I. Background

The term “Diamond Open Access” refers to models of open access publishing in which authors are not charged publication fees, operating on a non-commercial, not-for-profit basis in the interests of research and science and the humanities. Publication media committed to the Diamond idea are mostly under public or academic sponsorship. They are sometimes funded through various fee models, but often from institutional budgets and project funding. Sponsoring institutions include universities, institutions of higher education, foundations, non-university institutions, academies, archives, funding organisations and scholarly societies.

As research-led and, in many cases, researcher-owned opportunities for publication, Diamond Open Access offerings are of great importance in creating a publishing system for science and the humanities that promotes diversity, multiple perspectives, needs-based equity and quality orientation. They enable communication to be oriented towards specific target groups, and providing they have sufficient financial capacity, they are generally able to respond flexibly and innovatively when it comes to adapting to the requirements of digital scientific communication due to their independence from the interests and framework conditions that apply in the commercial sphere. The overall conditions for publishing are determined by research-oriented requirements and are not subject to any non-scientific interests. By waiving publication fees, they also fulfil the requirements of a publication system based on the principle of equity in the sense of equal access to publication opportunities. Due to the absence of profit interests, they also contribute to an open publication infrastructure that is in the interests of research because by their nature, they do not incur disproportionately high costs that divert funds from other areas of the research system.

The existing Diamond Open Access infrastructure is not currently tapping into the considerable potential of non-commercial, research-led publishing. This infrastructure is primarily organised on a decentralised basis and is geared in particular to the needs of smaller, interdisciplinary research communities or those based around national languages. There is often a lack of resources to raise procedural or technical standards and pick up on innovations in the digital context. The reputation of journals and of conference and book series produced according to the Diamond model often lags behind competing offerings from established players due to a lack of indexing in commercial databases, for example, making it more difficult to guarantee the acquisition of articles and a commitment to editorship and research quality assurance. The lack of visibility and the existing reputation regime mean that even technically and organisationally innovative and attractive Diamond Open Access offerings find it difficult to gain a foothold within the research communities. There is also a considerable shortage of editorial positions, for which the sponsoring organisations are generally responsible. Financing often depends on the reputation associated with the operation of the infrastructure. Both globally and

in Germany, therefore, there is currently a heterogeneous landscape of offerings which are of varying standards in terms of content, organisation and technology.

The DFG has supported the development and expansion of Diamond Open Access infrastructures for decades, currently under the “Infrastructures for Scholarly Publishing” funding programme (IWP). Funding under this programme has promoted open access journals, specialised open access repositories, infrastructures for book publication, and the discipline-specific advancement of Diamond Open Access infrastructures, also in connection with Specialised Information Services (FID).

By issuing this call for proposals, the DFG aims to strengthen this area further by picking up on the momentum that has clearly developed in the Diamond Open Access sector since the beginning of the 2020s. The call for proposals is linked to the international “Action Plan for Diamond Open Access” signed by the DFG in spring 2022¹ and addresses the challenges formulated therein. It draws on the findings of the Diamond Open Access Study commissioned by Coalition S² and other current studies³, as well as incorporating insights from international and European projects and infrastructures (DIAMAS, PALOMERA, CRAFT-OA), and taking account of the work of European infrastructure organisations (OPERAS) and national cooperation networks (scholar-Led.network). Last but not least, the call for proposals is geared towards the agenda set by European research policy, which has recently given the Diamond model a political boost – through the Council’s conclusions on research publishing⁴ and the planned expansion of “Open Research Europe” as a supranational publication platform.

II. Objective and Scope of Funding

1. Objective

The objective of the funding is to boost the performance capacity of Diamond Open Access infrastructures located at publicly organised institutions in Germany or operated by non-commercial and non-profit actors in Germany. In this way, the funding will seek to contribute to a

¹ Ancion, Z., Borrell-Damián, L., Mounier, P., Rooryck, J. & Saenen, B. (2022). Action Plan for Diamond Open Access. <https://zenodo.org/doi/10.5281/zenodo.6282402>.

² Bosman, J., Frantsvåg, J. E., Kramer, B., Langlais, P.-C., & Proudman, V. (2021). OA Diamond Journals Study. Part 1: Findings. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4558704>. Coalition S itself has also recently commented on the complexity of the issue, albeit using different terms: Coalition S (2023). Towards responsible publishing: a proposal from cOAlition S. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8398480>.

³ For example the PLATO study conducted in Switzerland: Hahn, D., Hehn, J., Hopp, C. & Pruschak, G. (2021): Mapping the Swiss Landscape of Diamond Open Access Journals. The PLATO Study on Scholar-Led Publishing. Report. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7461728>.

⁴ Council of the European Union (2023). Council conclusions on high-quality, transparent, open, trustworthy and equitable scholarly publishing. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9616-2023-INIT/en/pdf>. On this point, see: Statement by the DFG regarding the EU Council Conclusions on “High-quality, transparent, open, trustworthy and equitable scholarly publishing” (2023). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8224868>.

high-quality system of open access publication channels that is better networked nationally and globally, subject-specific, differentiated and efficient, and is able to precisely fulfil the requirements of digital publishing in the research field.

The increase in performance which this call for proposals seeks to achieve is to be measured by the following standards:

- Firstly, the aim is to achieve standardisation and international compatibility while ensuring first-rate processes so that publications of a high technical quality can be made available that are attractive from the perspective of the research user.
- Secondly, a process of consolidation and nationwide, subject specific networking is to be promoted so as to avoid duplicate developments, transfer successful smaller-scale set-ups to larger structures wherever possible, and secure long-term operation more effectively. Both can be achieved by means of closer coordination of expertise and offerings.
- Thirdly, the conditions are to be further improved to boost stimulation of Diamond Open Access infrastructures in Germany so as to maintain and increase their innovative capacity, reliably identify specific areas where renewal is needed through the communities, and facilitate the practical implementation of innovative ideas.
- Fourthly, the aim is to work towards a broader recognition of Diamond Open Access offerings as high-quality publication opportunities so that articles published through such channels can effectively influence the development of knowledge in a discipline (epistemic dimension) while at the same time enhancing the reputation of the researchers who publish via this route (social dimension).

2. Scope

The call for proposals provides start-up funding for a Service Centre from which the entire landscape of Diamond Open Access publishing in Germany can benefit and which is able to bring about an increase in performance as outlined above. As a national point of contact, the Service Centre is not only to take on the tasks of providing, clustering and arranging fundamental technical and organisational services, it is also to offer advisory services and contribute to the subject-specific and international networking and coordination of decentralised offerings.

Individual publication media often face similar challenges of a technical and organisational nature, regardless of their content. For this reason, support services are needed both in the start-up phase and during full-scale operation, offering basic services but also addressing discipline-specific peculiarities. These support services are to cluster expertise and should be coordinated from a single centre. Organised as a possibly decentralised network with a central point of contact, a Service Centre of this nature would increase the efficiency of the system,

since parallel and proprietary developments would be eliminated, especially in the technical area, and this increase in efficiency would enable uniform and more rigorous technical standards to be implemented.

The objective of this call for proposals is therefore to support an organisation or a network of organisations that establish or offer such services and could continue to do so after the funding expires if necessary. The services offered by the Service Centre must be free of charge while DFG funding is ongoing. In view of the dynamic development of the sector, there might no longer be a need for certain services to be provided in this form after the funding period is over (max. six years), and the Service Centre's portfolio could potentially be reconfigured using its own funds and/or a business model.

3. Function of the Service Centre within the system

The Service Centre is aimed at the research publishers of individual, subject-specific or interdisciplinary media in all fields of research (service segment 2, 3, 4). It specifically addresses publishing entities and scholarly societies in their function as operators of publication media. It is also aimed at institutions that offer publication services (service segment 1, 2, 4, 5) and other organisations that advise on open access (service segment 3, 4).

It will differ from other advisory centres (university centres, advisory services run by the DFG-funded Specialised Information Services, contact points serving federal states, oa.network) in that it will offer advisory services combined with services (of both a technical and an organisational nature) for the establishment, transfer and operation of non-profit media, and also in that it will aim to coordinate internationally recognised standards with regard to the processes involved in operating high-quality publication media.

In particular, the advisory services that exist in connection with individual Specialised Information Services can help ensure that the technical and organisational services offered by the Service Centre are communicated to the research communities in a way that is appropriate to each specific discipline. Exchange between Specialised Information Services (FID) and the Service Centre should ideally be of a reciprocal nature: the former are to serve as multipliers of the services offered by the latter, but in their role as multipliers, the FID will also benefit from their knowledge of discipline-specific publication cultures, which they can share with the Service Centre.

What is more, the offer of basic technical services is aimed at organisations that operate non-profit publication media but do not have the capacity to evolve or implement standards.

In particular with regard to the networking and mapping tasks of the Service Centre, it will be aimed at all bodies actively involved in open access in Germany so as to establish a coordinated overall view, also promoting convergence, the exchange of expertise, standardisation and innovation. In this way, FID and institutional advisory services will be able both to refer users to the Service Centre and benefit from its offerings.

The services offered by the Service Centre may only benefit legal entities under public law or not-for-profit organisations (i.e. journals published by such institutions, for example), or individual researchers.

III. Project Requirements

1. Portfolio

The funded Service Centre will offer services in the following areas:

- **Workflow-related basic services** including layout, design, typesetting, writing environments, editorial software, metadata preparation, PID allocation, hosting, administration of review processes. This also includes advice and implementation on indexing in relevant databases (DOAJ, etc.) and assistance with the relevant processes. Other points included here are the development of toolboxes, starter kits and templates, e.g. for single-source publishing. Finally, another relevant point will be the offer or arrangement of long-term archiving.
- **Support for publication media:** In particular, the Service Centre should also provide (modular) offerings to support publication media relating to various phases of development and expansion or geared towards the transition to non-commercial open access. Recommendations on the allocation of roles and job profiles in the development and operation of publication media are important, as is information on the organisation of governance, information on operating models, guidelines for authors and editors, information on different quality control procedures, checklists, guidance on the costs of individual tasks involved in operating publication infrastructures under public law, and support in determining and disclosing costs. The services provided should include imparting skills and expertise. Other areas to be covered are legal (advisory) services, e.g. on the subject of brand and domain protection, content licensing and the transformation and changeover of a provider from a for-profit publisher to a public law or non-commercial and non-profit publication provider, and the commissioning of legal opinions on possible issues for the public law sector.
- **Networking services:** This includes the (international) networking of subject-specific offerings (possibly in cooperation with relevant specialised information services, NFDI consortia and central specialised libraries); profile building, interaction with potential

target communities, offerings for scholarly societies; networking with relevant research data infrastructures where appropriate; and last but not least tapping into ideas from thematically related projects in the international environment so as to transfer and incorporate them. This might include the Diamond Action Plan and the “Diamond Capacity Hub (DCH)” to be set up on a decentralised basis within the European framework, for example, with which the Service Centre as a national Diamond Capacity Center (DCC) is to closely cooperate within the framework of an infrastructure⁵ that is distributed worldwide, as well as other relevant EU projects.

- **Map out and establish a registry:** The Service Centre is to carry out ongoing monitoring of public, non-commercial and non-profit publications in Germany and systematise these according to disciplines or other characteristics. Extracts from the DOAJ with supplements can also be used for this purpose. These overviews should be openly accessible and regularly updated. An overview should contain statements on quality standards and processes at the editorial level, review of articles and technical standards.
- **Promote innovation:** The Service Centre also has the task of identifying frequently required services and systematically recording the needs reported by individual publication infrastructures, as well as integrating these in its portfolio of services on an ongoing basis according to importance and numbers of requests. It will also serve as an “innovation lab” with the aim of picking up on new technical developments, while also customising such developments for simple re-use by individual publication media, possibly in cooperation with these same media or their sponsoring institutions.

The services can either be offered by the Service Centre itself or provided by third parties through the Service Centre.

Proposals must include details of the design of the planned Service Centre and the specific implementation of the portfolio envisaged, in particular setting out the measures to achieve coordination and networking and to address subject-specialist communities.

2. Standards

The services offered by the Service Centre must help ensure that relevant standards can be met by public, non-commercial and non-profit publishers.

The guiding principles here are as follows:

⁵ Vgl. Mounier, P., Rooryck, J. (2023): Towards a federated global community of Diamond Open Access. A discussion paper. <https://thd.hypotheses.org/296>.

- The technical principles of “Coalition S”.⁶
- The “Principles of Open Scholarly Infrastructure”.⁷
- The “Extensible Quality Standard for Institutional Publishing” developed in connection with the EU-funded DIAMAS project.⁸
- Other results of relevant projects or in connection with the Action Plan for Diamond Open Access.

The following should also be taken into account:

- the DOAJ guidelines for quality-assured journals.⁹
- The COPE principles.¹⁰

The services provided by the Service Centre are essentially to be open to all public-law, non-commercial and non-profit publishing providers, but should in particular be made available to those providers who do not yet meet the standards listed or other standards, with the aim of helping them to do so.

3. Establish the Service Centre as a central hub

Institutions submitting a proposal must demonstrate how the offerings they are planning will be able to be achieved, and maintain and expand the status of a national Service Centre and an international hub. Here it is important to set out in full detail the extent to which broad acceptance and a high level of utilisation of the planned services can be achieved in the future. A viable concept is therefore required to establish the Service Centre as a central hub within the existing and developing network of Diamond Open Access publication infrastructures, both in Germany and internationally, in line with the idea of a national “Diamond Capacity Center (DCC)” as a building block of an infrastructure for Diamond Open Access distributed worldwide.¹¹

IV. Type and Extent of Funding

Only proposals from public institutions or not-for-profit organisations will be eligible for funding.

⁶ Plan S – Principles and Implementation. Part III: Technical Guidance and Requirements. https://www.coalition-s.org/technical-guidance_and_requirements/.

⁷ Bilder G., Lin J., Neylon C. (2020). The Principles of Open Scholarly Infrastructure. <https://doi.org/10.24343/C34W2H>.

⁸ Armengou, C., Redhead, C., & Rooryck, J. (2023). D3.5 Extensible Quality Standard in Institutional Publishing (EQSIP). Version 1.0_under EC review (V1.0). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7923916>.

⁹ Directory of Open Access Journals (2023). Guide to applying – Basic criteria for inclusion. Version 1.3. <https://doaj.org/apply/guide/#basic-criteria-for-inclusion>.

¹⁰ Principles of transparency and best practice in scholarly publishing (2022). Version 4.0. <https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.1.12>.

¹¹ Vgl. Mounier, Rooryck (2023): Towards a federated global community of Diamond Open Access.

Under this call for proposals, only a single project to set up a Service Centre can be awarded funding. A consortium of different organisations could potentially be formed to take responsibility for the various areas of the Service Centre (see III.1), or several organisations could join forces to develop the overall range of services. By holding a joint event prior to proposal submission (see V below), the DFG Head Office seeks to promote coordination between those interested in submitting proposals. If competing proposals are submitted, a maximum of one proposal will be selected for funding as a result of the review process.

The call for proposals allows funding to be applied for to set up the Service Centre for an initial period of three years and for a total of up to six years. Funds totalling a maximum of €1,500,000 are available per year.]

V. Deadlines and Submission of Proposals

The DFG Head Office is organising a general information event on **7 February 2024** for institutions that are essentially interested in submitting a proposal.

Interested parties are requested to submit a **letter of intent by 15 March 2024 (max. four pages)** containing the following information:

- Brief description of the project:
 - Plan for the product portfolio.
 - Description of the planned procedure for networking and establishing the Service Centre in the context of the Diamond Open Access infrastructure.
 - Details of which services cannot be provided in-house and which external expertise or partners may be required.
- Information on the project structure (persons and institutions involved).
- Planned project duration.
- Estimate of the amount of funds required.

A proposal may only be submitted if a letter of intent has been submitted beforehand. Please submit letters of intent by e-mail to lis-aa-diamond@dfg.de.

A meeting of all interested parties is planned for **mid/end of April 2024** for the purpose of coordinating a potential joint project.

Funding proposals are to be submitted in English via elan by 1 August 2024.

Proposals are to be submitted solely via the elan portal in order to ensure proposal-related data is recorded and documents are securely transmitted (<https://elan.dfg.de>). When submitting your proposal, please consult the Project Proposal Preparation Instructions – Project Proposals in the Area of Scientific Library Services and Information Systems (LIS) (DFG form 12.01).

Further information

For the guidelines relevant to proposal submissions, see:
www.dfg.de/foerderung/formulare

VI. Contact persons at the DFG

For queries regarding proposal submission and advice:

Dr. Sebastian Brandt: Phone +49 228 885-2048, lis-oa-diamond@dfg.de

Dr. Angela Holzer: Phone +49 228 885-2568, lis-oa-diamond@dfg.de