

## Evaluating a Comprehensive Toolkit for Journal Editors and Publishers: Insights from Nepal and Developing Nations

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### ABSTRACT

The Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Publishing (C4DISC) has published a focused toolkit to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) in scientific publications and help editors and publishers create a more inclusive and equitable publishing environment. The online toolkit has several sections. Among the recommendations are developing an inclusive culture and mission, collecting and reporting demographic data of authors, reviewers and editors using inclusive terminology, recruiting broadly and internationally for the positions of journal editors, board members and reviewers, train and mentor peer reviewers, and fostering equity in peer review. Many recommendations can be easily adopted by journals while some others may be more challenging. Despite its limitations, the toolkit is a good first initiative to promote DEIA in academic publishing.

**Keywords:** Scholarly publishing, developing countries, mentors, publishing, peer review, cultural diversity, demography

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Despite several initiatives the number of publications from resource limited settings in scientific journals is low. A recent study mentioned that authors from outside high-income countries accounted for only 13% of articles published in selected medical education journals [1]. Articles published in highly ranked public health journals in 2016 were examined and over 90% of first, last and corresponding authors of the articles published were from high-income

countries [2]. Diversification of editorial boards and peer reviewers has been recommended to improve equity and representation in scientific publishing. A study among communication journals found that diverse editorial boards are more likely to publish more diverse research articles based on the country of the first author and the country where the data was collected [3]. Hence strengthening diversity in journal stakeholders is important. Initiatives to

strengthen diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) are important. Recently, the Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Publishing (C4DISC) developed a focused toolkit to promote DEIA in scientific publications. This toolkit is designed to assist journal editors and publishers in creating a more inclusive and equitable publishing environment. It is available from <https://c4disc.pubpub.org/toolkit-editors-and-publishers>, and contains water colour illustrations created by Jane Harris, with design input from Dawn Zumbahlen. These illustrations celebrate the different ways in which we can create a more diverse and inclusive culture. The authors examine the toolkit in this article.

The online toolkit is presented in different sections. Each section is well supported by evidence and the authors of the toolkit mention that they present the toolkit in a spirit of cultural humility. The first recommendation emphasizes developing an inclusive culture and mission. Established journals in developing nations, which attract articles globally, could benefit from adopting a diversity statement and appointing a DEIA editor. For example, the addition of a DEI editor to the Journal of Vascular Surgery resulted in a significant impact on the diversification of topics, authorship of editorials, special articles, and invited commentaries, as well as participation in the peer review process [4]. Being associated in an editorial capacity with journals in Nepal and with several years of research, teaching and work experience in the country, the authors of this manuscript examine the relevance and applicability of the toolkit from the Nepalese and developing nations perspective in this article. Certain established journals from developing nations attract articles from other developing and even developed countries. Having a diversity statement and a diversity, equity and inclusion editor can be good approaches for these and other journals.

Article processing charges (APC) may also be a challenge as national governments in developing nations may not be willing and/or able to enter into costly transformative agreements with major publishing houses to pay for APC. This payment may also result in a shift of scarce resources from less resourced settings to

publishers in developed nations. APCs pose a significant challenge as governments in developing nations often cannot afford costly agreements with major publishers, leading to resource allocation issues. APCs stratify scientific publishing and disadvantage institutions with lesser resources in developing nations [5]. Recently, Nepal's shift to a lower middle-income status has resulted in only a 50% APC discount for its authors, making publication costs prohibitive.

The second recommendation advocates for the collection and reporting of demographic data using inclusive terminology. Most journal management systems, including Open Journal Systems (OJS) used by many journals in Nepal, already facilitate this data collection. Strengthening data privacy laws is essential to protect collected data. They recommend the use of inclusive terms when referring to demographics. Most of this data is already being collected by journal management systems. Most journals in developing nations also use these systems for authors to submit manuscripts and to invite reviewers. The open journal systems (OJS) by the Public Knowledge Project offers publishers in developing nations the option to develop a journal management system using open-source software. Many journals in Nepal are using this system. Open journal systems streamline the submission, and the editorial process and authors benefit from increased visibility and citation of their works [6]. Articles published using this system are automatically indexed by Google Scholar and their cross integration with different services like ORCID and DOAJ. Developing nations may however need to develop or strengthen their data privacy laws to ensure the safety of the collected data.

The third recommendation focuses on broad and international recruitment. Despite journal positions being largely voluntary and online, some renowned individuals may hesitate to associate with lesser-known journals due to concerns about the quality of the journal. The authors of the toolkit recommend the stakeholders of a journal to allow open calls for nomination and the language and information about these calls should be carefully vetted by the stakeholders. Journals should recruit more

broadly and widely, and many journals are beginning to do this. The toolkit does not provide specific recommendations in this regard. This is a limitation that can be addressed in future versions of the toolkit.

The fourth recommendation is to train and mentor reviewers. Journals in developed nations are increasingly conducting webinars for peer reviewers. These trainings are hosted online. Journals from Nepal and other developing nations can create an online course for peer reviewers by sharing resources. Co-mentoring could be useful and junior reviewers can learn from more seasoned ones. The authors agree with the suggestion to also include non-academic reviewers where possible. Non-academic peer reviewers are not university trained but have lived experience, traditional or local knowledge of a particular issue [7]. These reviewers can provide a broader non-academic perspective on an issue and its possible community impact.

The last recommendation is related to the fourth one and is on fostering equity in peer review. The terms citational justice statement and the article-level citation diversity statement were new though the authors were aware of the concept. Addressing bias among reviewers and reflecting on your own position and self-awareness are important.

The toolkit has been published for a global audience and at present only provides recommendations. This is a recent publication, but we would have liked to see specific guidelines or recommendations to implement DEIA. The authors of the toolkit have invited comments and feedback and hopefully the toolkit will further improve. Practical suggestions to move toward greater DEIA are important. The toolkit may need to be expanded. The toolkit has been created for a global audience but as editors and authors from developing nations we are interested in the perspective of developing nations. With access to the HINARI database, researchers from Nepal and other developing nations should be able to access diverse global research publications. HINARI has had a significant impact on publishing in developing nations [8]. The toolkit has several recommendations that can be

adapted by journals in Nepal. Some others may be more challenging as we have mentioned.

The focused toolkit is a good initiative to collate and present information from different sources to build diversity, equity, inclusivity, and accessibility in editorial roles and peer review.

## CONCLUSION

This freely accessible online toolkit can assist journal editors and publishers in strengthening inclusivity and equity in academic publishing. This is, however, a new toolkit and utilization data and the opinion of users should be collected to evaluate its usefulness. The cultural and social context of developing nations may also have to be considered while implementing some of the recommendations.

### Layman summary:

In this editorial the authors examine the focused toolkit recently published by the Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Publishing (C4DISC) to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) in scientific publications and help editors and publishers create a more inclusive and equitable publishing environment.

### Author Contributions:

PRS reviewed the toolkit and drafted the manuscript; KA helped in reviewing the toolkit and writing the manuscript and all authors reviewed the manuscript and approved the final version of the manuscript. All authors agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the research work. Note: PRS, and KA are abbreviated name authors

### Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare

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