Response to reviewers

Jamie and Mohammed,

Thank you for your thorough and thoughtful reviews of this editorial. Saying that "reviewers comments greatly improved this manuscript" is almost a cliché but at least in this case it is definitely true. Responses to individual comments are below, and a revised manuscipt is attached.

Sincerely,
Hannah

p.s. Moh, you might want to check whether the DOI on the tektonika editorial ever got deposited – I don't think it was at the time I'm writing this.

Reviewer A:

Review of "Editorial workflow of a community-led, all-volunteer scientific journal: lessons from the launch of Seismica"

Dear Editor,

Thank you for the opportunity to review this editorial piece, which I have read with great interest. An editorial with the explicit goal of increasing transparency and providing a workflow model is laudable, and in general the amount of documentation and guidance provided by Seismica for reviewers and authors is truly commendable. It is refreshing to see some of the key roadblocks of the OJS-based Diamond Open Access (DOA) model outlined explicitly (e.g. the additional production time requirements arising when authors submit in non-TeX file formats or use templates incorrectly). Similarly, it may be valuable for readers to be aware of the workloads involved in supporting/adopting this model (a good example of this is the additional steps required to convert source files into XML for online viewing, likely common to other diamond open access journals who employ the eLens functionality such as GEUS Bulletin, Volcanica). This article also shines light on some of the strengths of community-led diamond open access journals, including flexibility and attention to detail.

For the sake of clarity and transparency, I have a handful of questions/comments, given below.

Yours sincerely,
—Jamie Farquharson

Line 27: (not that I necessarily disagree)—you state that publishing "should require community buy-in and trust": why "should" it? Is there transparency in other forms of publishing (e.g. non-academic book publishing)?

I would argue that all forms of publishing that seek to inform readers require a form of community buy-in and trust. When I read a newspaper I have to trust that the reporting has a solid basis; when I read non-fiction books, academic or not, I have to trust that the contents are factual. In those contexts that trust might come from knowing that a news organization or a publishing house employs editors and fact-checkers. In the academic literature trust derives mainly from peer review, so from the community itself. We also have to trust that the rest of the editorial process – pre-submission checks, post-

acceptance processing – preserves the integrity of the discipline and of the work that is verified through peer review.

Looking back at this opening sentence, though, I can see that it reads a little oddly, and could be read as setting up a strawman. We certainly aren't trying to say that journals that aren't researcher-run somehow aren't trustworthy because that's not true. The goal of the opening paragraph is to establish that our motivation for writing this article is to share details of our publishing process so that anyone interested in knowing more about how publishing works, starting another journal, or discussing best practices for the community can read about all aspects of that process. There's also a DOA soapbox we could shout from, of course, but I think that all got said in a previous editorial (Rowe et al. 2022) and is not the focus here. So, I've updated the first paragraph to read:

"What goes on behind the scenes at academic journals typically remains closed to authors and readers. The purpose of this article is to help open up the "black box" of journal editing and operations (Baruch et al., 2008) in order to increase transparency, promote trust in academic publishing, and support the establishment and growth of new journals. Journals created and led by researchers with little or no connection to traditional publishers can benefit from having access to in-depth information on editorial processes, and we hope that sharing this information will enable researchers across disciplines to better understand and optimize editorial workflows over time through further sharing and collaboration."

General comment: are two published issues (e.g. line 45) sufficient to assure readers that the model is sustainable?

Perhaps not, but the intent in that line was not necessarily to say that our current model is sustainable – that sentence has been changed to "We hope to assist future community-led journals by sharing the processes and tools developed by Seismica before the journal launched and refined through Seismica's first year of operations, and by discussing how these processes and tools may continue to evolve with the journal."

Line 75: is this reference list to be submitted separately? If so it might be useful to highlight why (e.g. to reduce production times or facilitate CrossRef Cited-by submission), rather than it being an additional opaque step for authors.

No, the reference list isn't submitted separately. It should be part of the manuscript, just like any other journal – for anything that requires the reference list on its own, separate from the text (like crossref cited-by) we handle that on the back end.

Line 111–113: Are data and/or codes subject to peer review? If so how?

This is a good question. At the moment we don't have specific policies on data/code review. Anecdotally, I have seen reviewers verifying that cited data/codes are actually accessible, but there's no requirement that they try to run any scripts that were provided. One exception to that is software or field/data reports, where a reasonable review should include some tests of the code in question and/or checks that the data is fully accessible. A sentence has been added to that effect in the section on Open Science: "While reviewers may not always be able to verify that software works as reported (for example, when codes require high-performance computing resources), data and codes associated with software or data report manuscripts are subject to scrutiny as part of the review process."

On a side note, the Seismica board did have a meeting with the codecheck team (https://codecheck.org.uk/project/) a few months ago. We haven't done anything with that information but it's an interesting avenue to consider.

Lines 126–127: OJS does have this functionality, although imperfect. In the "Locate a Reviewer" section, there is a possibility to search by "Reviewer interests".

Fair point. If I recall correctly OJS lets reviewers assign whatever tags they like in free-text and the search requires exact text matching; the main reason we went with the separate database is that we wanted to make sure reviewers could be filtered in a meaningful way and the OJS tool didn't quite do that for us. That section has been updated with more details, and now reads:

"The reviewer database was built by Seismica's Tech Team, as OJS's native functionality for tagging and filtering registered users by expertise did not fully meet our needs. OJS allows users registering as reviewers to self-assign expertise tags, but does not limit those tags to any pre-defined list, so users could self-assign a wide variety of tags with similar meanings: for example, "seismic imaging" and "tomography". This presents a difficulty to HEs, who would need to come up with creative and expansive search terms to filter users by these tags. In contrast, Seismica's reviewer database has a simple interface where potential reviewers can register by signing in with their ORCID and can then self-assign tags for their areas of expertise from a pre-defined list."

Lines 132–133: Although there will certainly be a general relationship between career stage and editorial experience, being an ECR and having editorial experience are not mutually exclusive. Similarly, being a senior researcher in no way guarantees that one has editorial experience. I recommend this is rephrased.

Done – changed that sentence to "Seismica's HEs have varying levels of experience with managing the editorial process."

Line 156: (how) can Seismica ensure that the document templates are used correctly? For example, although the majority of authors will be familiar with word processing in Microsoft Word, they may not be familiar with the use of style panes, headings, etc. Does an editor check this before manuscripts are forwarded to typesetters?

The short answer is that we can't ensure that templates are used correctly. Like many journals, we include instructions in the downloadable template files telling authors to use the document styles provided (this is noted in the section on templates). Handling editors are supposed to check that, at minimum, the authors' files *look* like they've used our templates. In practice, some editors probably don't know what our templates are supposed to look like, and in my experience they definitely aren't checking styles.

The middle ground that we've reached so far is that if something is egregiously out of template, we bounce it back to the authors for corrections before we start copyediting, but most of the time we just correct or work around smaller template issues. I added this sentence: "Copy/layout editors will correct some small errors in template usage as needed, but authors who submit article files for production that are clearly not in a Seismica template are asked to reformat their work before article production can proceed."

Lines 176–178: I find the reference to the Guild of Diamonds here somewhat misleading. This is not an official body, nor is it truly transparent—the so-called Guild has no (public) active online presence and the members of the appeals committee are not identified—as such authors cannot be assured that it can act as an impartial ombudsman. As the authors must be aware, the invite-only Guild of Diamonds Slack channel (from which the self-nominated appeals committee representatives have been drawn) has a sole administrator: a senior Seismica editor and one of the authors of this editorial piece. This information would perhaps not be reassuring to an aggrieved rejectee seeking an independent appeal.

As an aside, in seeking to formalise the Guild of Diamonds appeals committee, the authors here are implicitly formalising the Guild of Diamonds (Slack) group. Given a) that the Slack channel includes representatives of multiple journals not included in this committee, and b) that the name of this Slack channel was tongue-in-cheek and not necessarily intended to reflect a formal entity, I would urge caution on this point.

Thanks for this comment. For the purposes of this editorial, I've taken out references to the "Guild of Diamonds" since, as you note, it's not a formal entity; the multi-journal appeals committee exists separately from that slack channel.

We've also flagged this question of appeals procedures/transparency more broadly for our next policies/guidelines update. While we agree that transparency is important for showing authors that appeals are considered impartially, we're somewhat hesitant about identifying appeals committee members on our website as we don't want to put them in line for targeted harrassment. Granted, all of our board members' identities are public and our work emails are online so it's not like there's much privacy left to protect, but we did have an incident with a declined manuscript where the author tried to escalate their argument by emailing the entire Seismica board, and listing the appeals board members online seems guaranteed to divert any such vitriol directly to them. One possible middle ground might be to identify the appeals board members to authors when they start the appeals process, so they know who they're talking to and can be confident of avoiding COIs.

Line 207: How exactly is the production of fast reports expedited? What happens if multiple fast reports are accepted around the same time?

Expediting production in this case means that the expectation for how long a copy/layout editor will take to produce the proofs is shorter than for a standard article, and the time between proof acceptance and making final galleys should be 3 days or less (this is noted a few lines down from 207 in the initial submission). These expectations are communicated when the copy/layout editor is assigned. So far we haven't had a deluge of simultaneous fast reports to deal with, but I imagine that if we did, the process would have to slow down.

Figure 2: Do Seismica register metadata with any other platforms (such as the Directory of Open Access Journals)?

Not yet - at time of writing our DOAJ application is under review.

Line 234: Does Seismica make use of any of these for indexing services on third-party online repositories?

We aren't indexed in PubMed specifically, but we are in the process of being added to GeoRef! I'm not going to add this to the manuscript, though, as it's not complete yet.

Lines 288–290: What are the issues with displaying author names? Looking at some recent Seismica articles, the author names seem to be displayed correctly.

This referred to issues with the Lens viewer not displaying things like corresponding author info well – it had to be folded into affiliations even though in theory JATS has ways of designating that metadata separately. But it's not a huge thing so we've taken out that bit of the sentence.

Lines 370–372: This sounds like a sensible initiative. How is this managed with respect to time zones etc.? What proportion of the board are able to attend these?

We typically run two sessions for each of these meetings, ~12 hours apart, to try and catch as many time zones as we can; I've noted that in the text. I don't know that anyone has tracked participation consistently, to be honest.

Lines 412–415: Does Seismica manage the OJS back-end (e.g. software installation and updates, plugin installation etc.), or is this controlled by the funding institution? When you talk about "coding [the] publishing workflow," are you referring to in-house typesetting tools, or to open software development such as plugins (or something different)? Has any development been done in coordination with third-party developers or PKP?

McGill libraries control the backend of OJS, and they handle updates and any plugin requests we have. That line here refers to in-house tools and has been clarified in the text. A few board members have done UI feedback sessions with PKP developers, and we've raised one or two issues on the PKP forums, but I don't think any Seismica folks have actively contributed to OJS development yet.

Lines 414–415: General question: is it a problem that much of the work is "invisible" (which connotes "unrewarded")?

Personally, I don't think it's a problem. It's often said that good design is invisible, and I'd expand "design" in our case to include our workflows for document conversion/layout and systems for media promotion as well as the actual look and feel of published articles. I changed that sentence to: "The workflow has been dynamic in the first year, with continual improvements often made in response to feedback from authors, reviewers, and readers of Seismica."

Line 452: Of course, other geoscience-focused DOA journals exist, such as GEUS Bulletin and The Sedimentary Record (both of which recently flipped from different publishing formats to a DOA model). To what extent can the workflow outlined here be ported to different publication models or setups beyond the OJS environment?

I expect that much of the workflow could be used for journals using platforms other than OJS. We do refer to OJS a lot in this manuscript, but I think a lot of the particular aspects we refer to aren't actually unique to the platform. My intuition is that our workflow could pretty easily map onto other journal publishing platforms with most differences coming from user interfaces. I added this sentence to the last paragraph accordingly: "While our processes are designed around OJS, we expect that this workflow could be translated to other journal management systems."

Reviewer B:

Dear Author and Editor,

First, I would like to apologize for the delay in submitting my review report.

I really enjoyed reading your piece and as someone who's already involved with a DOAJ (i.e., TEKTONIKA), I can see the benefit of this kind of publications. This contribution offers a roadmap for people interested in setting up a DOAJ and it is a great resource to increase awareness of the issues faced by community-led publishing and the solutions that have been crafted by committed members.

I only have some minor suggestions and corrections that I have annotated directly on the attached PDF document. I hope you will find these useful. Please do not hesitate to contact me if any of my comments are unclear.

I congratulate you on the work you are doing in Seismica and have no doubt that the seismic community in particular and the scientific community in general value greatly your contribution to true open science.

All the best,

Mohamed Gouiza
mgouiza@ucdavis.edu

Thank you for the detailed comments on the pdf! We have implemented most of the suggested changes; for the few that we didn't use, here are some brief thoughts on why:

- *Suggestion to change "journals with paid staff members" or "professionally staffed journals" to "for profit journals"*: We put a lot of thought into what term to use in describing contrasting journals. The question of for-profit vs non-profit is important in terms of philosophy, but in the context of editorial workflow and tools, we felt that what makes Seismica's setup unique (and worth writing about) is how we do all the things a journal has to do with volunteers from the scientific community. The intent is not to denigrate the abilities of volunteers, but I think it's accurate to say that our operational team members, for all they do an excellent job, aren't professional copyeditors, designers, tech support, etc., and that is especially relevant to the design of our editorial workflow.

- *"associated guest editors" vs "associate guest editors":* We don't use "associate editor" as a title, so this referred to guest handling editors associated with a particular special issue. Just a semantic difference, really.

- *On describing the long-term outlook for Seismica and similar DOAJ:* I guess that paragraph could read as pessimistic, and I agree that there are other options beyond just those 4 (I amended the paragraph to imply that, saying that we have "options, including the following:"). I think it's important, though, to point out the limitations of our operation, and I don't think the takeaway is necessarily that Seismica will need to introduce some paid component in order to survive, or that we don't have any good options for the future. Rather, the big question we were trying to articulate is how much growth

this model can sustain and where we want to fit in the publishing ecosystem going forward. Seismica is never going to be as big as GRL or Nature or Science, and I see that less as indicative of DOAJ remaining on the sidelines and more as us finding the niche that we can fill, filling it well, and making space for other researcher-led journals to do the same. I would love to see changes to the larger publishing ecosystem prompted by open access/open science movements, and I think there's a lot of room for improvement within the for-profit and non-diamond non-profit journal world that we can help push for without our having to grow into much larger organizations that can't be sustained long-term.