



**Proposed NISO Work Item: Recommended Practice for
Manuscript Exchange Across Systems
(Short Title: Manuscript Exchange Common Approach (MECA))**

**The following proposed work item is submitted by:
Tony Alves, Aries Systems; Chris Heid, Clarivate Analytics;
Joel Plotkin, eJournal Press; John Sack, HighWire Press; Helen Atkins, PLOS**

**Proposal Last Modified: March 8, 2018
Approved by the NISO Information Creation & Curation Topic Committee March 9, 2018**

Introduction & Statement of Problem:

In the current environment, there are many situations in which scholarly manuscripts at various stages in their lives need to move from system to system. Most of the existing systems are proprietary, each having its own requirements for formats, metadata, etc. While the Web has made it possible to do much of the work of managing submission, peer review, and production electronically, each time a manuscript needs to move from one system to another (for whatever reason, and there are many) there is work to be done. As one prime example, for an author whose manuscript is rejected from their journal of choice, that work involves manually going through the submission and peer review process at another journal, potentially in a different manuscript system, entering much of the same data. The same reviewers may be asked to review the paper - or perhaps new ones, who do not have the advantage of seeing the initial reviews and how the authors may have addressed any issues surfaced. Not only is this annoying to the author, but the time and effort this takes is not trivial. Another application that addresses both authors and publishers is that of manuscript transfer - where the publisher would like to offer the author the option to shift their manuscript to another journal, most often another in that publisher's portfolio, but that could be to another publisher - or the transfer could be between a preprint site and a journal. This sort of transfer provides a service to the author and saves time for them and the publishers involved.

There are many protocols for point-to-point transfers from one system to another, but there is nothing that has attempted to work at this scale across multiple systems. Recognizing that a single protocol as an open standard for such exchange would benefit many parties, a group of organizations involved in manuscript submission systems agreed to work together toward that goal. These organizations include systems currently in use by thousands of journals.

The manuscript exchange common approach (MECA) project exists to develop a common means to easily transfer manuscripts between and among manuscript systems. However, we see the potential for this exchange protocol to be more generally applicable, taking in production systems, preprint servers, secondary databases, authoring services, author service vendors, repositories, and others.

Stakeholders:

Manuscript submission and peer review system vendors, at a minimum. For additional applications, any system that handles manuscripts and might have a need to send and/or receive manuscript data from other systems could be included. Examples might include production vendors, publishers, preprint servers, author services vendors/authoring systems.

Statement of Work:

We have been taking a phased approach to the project as there are many potential applications. First and foremost is the basic transfer between MS systems. This applies to full submissions as well as preprints. We would expect to meet the initial requirements, see how the protocol is adopted, and then continue to build out to include additional applications.

The project does not propose to set out policies for implementation, nor will it involve software or service development. The scope is limited to a NISO recommended practice (non-proprietary and CC-BY by default).

The project includes the following areas of work:

- Vocabulary - provide a standard nomenclature enabling disparate parties to have a common understanding
- Packaging - provide a simple, flexible, standard way to assemble files for transfer; define what files are allowed, and what files are required
- Tagging - provide XML tagging guidelines to allow for passing submission data from system to system; define minimal required data; provide guidance for adding new data types
- Peer review data - specify how (optional) peer review data may be transferred; allow for journals' privacy policies to be enforced in the transfer
- Transfer information - provide needed metadata about the transfer itself including the source of the transfer, the destination, and security information
- Identity - provide a means for establishing unique, consistent transfer item identity across systems (relates to the transfer, not the MS)
- Transmission - provide a simple, consistent way to send the information across systems such that it may be widely adopted

Work Timeline:

Much of the base work described above has been done over the past 18 months by a group of cooperating organizations: Aries Systems, Clarivate Analytics, eJournal Press, HighWire Press, and PLOS. We are at a stage where several of the participants are completing reference implementations.

We are now looking to broaden the working group and hear from others who will help finalize and formalize these efforts. Those who may have additional applications will help ensure that nothing we decide in the short term will make expansion for additional applications difficult to implement. Working under the NISO umbrella will allow us to accomplish those goals: 1) formalize the work and 2) get both broader input and adoption.

The current work group has developed a website where we have posted PPT presentations: <https://www.manuscriptexchange.org/>

Various members of our working group have been speaking at industry events and conferences, and we have been building an email list of interested persons who have asked to be kept up to date on progress. We expect to be able to mine that list for potential additional working group members should our proposal be accepted.