



## Aries Industry Advisory Board

**Date:** June 7, 2019

**Time:** 9:00am – 4:30pm

**Location:** W Hotel, 100 Stuart Street, Boston, MA, USA

**Attendees:**

**Aries:** Lyndon Holmes, Jennifer Fleet, Jocelyn Anthony, Tony Alves, Betsy Hopkins, Kate Horgan

**SSRN:** Gregg Gordon

**Industry:** American Psychological Association, American Society of Civil Engineers, American Society of Clinical Oncology, Brill, IEEE, John Wiley & Sons, Kaufman Wills Fusting, PLOS, Taylor & Francis, Thieme, University of Chicago Press, Wolters Kluwer

The meeting commenced at 9:11am following breakfast and registration. Jennifer Fleet, Chief Operating Officer – Aries Systems welcomed the Board, thanking them for their participation in the second meeting of the AIAB.

Jennifer reviewed the Ground Rules for the Board and the meeting, including legal guidance and participant guidelines:

- Strong US and EU enforcement against anti-competitive behavior:
  - No limiting of competition
  - No targeting of competitors
  - No allocation of market share
  - No raising of barriers to entry
  - No setting of prices
  - No sharing confidential business secrets (e.g., cost data)
  - OK to develop industry standards
  - Industry standards can include protocols and technologies such as citation linking (CrossRef) and even content platforms (HighWire Press) or editorial management systems (Aries).
  - Legal disclosure is implicit in all AIAB conversations
- Participants should observe the following:
  - Limit their discussions and exchanges of information (including agendas) to reflect the parameters above
  - Document discussions and meetings
  - In drafting any presentations or information to be exchanged, be mindful of the competition law connotations and implications, consider vetting such documents with counsel
  - If it appears that a project or several projects may result, consider how to foster inclusion and transparency principles
  - Ensure appropriate legal briefing of participants, along the lines described above, but also as appropriate with your own legal counsel

Following was an introduction of Aries staff and Board attendees.

Jennifer then discussed the Objectives of the board meetings:

- What can Aries do to advance scholarly communication through technology and process
- Provide a level playing field across all publishers and Aries customers
- Integrate third party solutions
- Provide a forum for both customers and the industry to advise Aries on the extent and messaging of the firewall between Aries and Elsevier

Betsy provided a recap of the December meeting and key discussion points. The following action items for the Aries team came from the December meeting, with updates provided:

- Distribute the Security Audit scope and objectives ahead of audit and results following completion: Jennifer provided an update on the Audit scope and results (see later notes)
- Distribute meeting minutes in advance of posting on Aries website; then post on website for public consumption: Action completed following December meeting
- Provide a clear statement on the Single Code Base, including no change in our development process: Tony reviewed Aries' Single Code Base Statement (see later notes)
- Jocelyn Koller will distribute reimbursement process information by the end of day Monday: Action completed following December meeting
- The next AIAB meeting will be in June in Boston, MA, USA; date to be selected and announced soon: Action completed following December meeting

Board attendees requested the following:

- Regular communications and updates from Aries to the Board between meetings, providing regular status of the activities that come out of the prior meetings. Betsy is working with Aries Marketing to develop a communications plan that will include monthly communications to the Board. Monthly notices will be distributed even if there is no substantial news to communicate at that time.

Additional conversations included:

- There have been some organizational structure changes since our December meeting: Kumsal Bayazit was named CEO of Elsevier in February 2019. Dominic Feltham has succeeded her at Reed Exhibitions. Aries remains in the Research Products domain of Elsevier, with Jennifer now reporting to Mie-Yun Lee, Kumsal's Chief of Staff. Both Kumsal and Mie-Yun are committed to the operating principles presented.
- As COO, Jennifer leads the business, with Product Management, Client Services, Project Management and Marketing reporting directly to her.
- Lyndon Holmes remains Founder of Aries, providing advice, guidance, and history.

Jennifer Fleet presented an update on the audits:

- Aries undertook two audits to fulfill client and board, as well as internal requirements.
- The initial audit was a SOC [service organization control]-2 Readiness assessment, which is a preliminary assessment in preparing for SOC-2 certification. SOC-2 is an industry standard that audits data security and protection. The readiness audit was initiated by Aries Operations at the start of the year to identify any areas to improve in preparation for certification. This audit was completed by Schellman & Company.

- Preliminary outcome: Of the issues cited, approximately 75% were related to incomplete documentation of procedures, though the procedures were demonstrated to be in place. The remaining issues identified areas for improvement in procedures. Those issues are being resolved and documented in anticipation of going for the certification in the coming year.
- The second audit was to address penetration-testing requirements of our clients and board. The pen testing (or ethical hacking), was to find any security vulnerabilities that an attacker could exploit. This audit was completed by Defendza.
  - Preliminary outcome: No significant risks identified. No short-term remediation recommended, with mid-term remediation focused on reviewing firewall rules and certificates. Long-term remediation to repeat the pen tests annually.
- Because work had already begun towards executing the SOC-2 Readiness audit, Aries management decided to review the findings of that audit first and cover any gaps in a secondary audit if needed. Following the SOC-2 Readiness audit, the need for additional pen testing was quickly identified and initiated.

Board attendees requested the following:

- More detail of the findings from both audits and what steps Aries is taking going forward.
- Executive summary of both audits, including definition of “business risk” vs. “reputation risk”. Board is asked to then identify any remaining gaps for Aries to remediate.

Additional conversations included:

- Agreement by the Board that Aries is heading in the right direction with the initial audits and review.
- Reiteration of Aries commitment to annual audits around procedural security and pen testing.

Jennifer Fleet presented the Guiding Principles:

- In response to the request from the Board in December for a “Clearly documented position paper or statement regarding the separation of publisher data across the entire organization,” Senior Management at Elsevier initiated a task to define Guiding Principles for the Aries/Elsevier relationship. The Senior Vice President of Research Integrity, IJsbrand Jan Aalbersberg, was tasked with crafting the principles with input from Aries management, and these were reviewed and assessed by Elsevier Senior Management, including Jennifer.
- The overall principle was summarized by Kumsal Bayazit, CEO of Elsevier, in this way: “Aries should be kept at arms-length, customer confidentiality is key, and customers should be able to rely on that.”
- Principles are contained below and also distributed with these notes as this file: Aries\_ELS Operating Principles.pdf

1. Customer-specific information needs to be kept confidential (within Aries).
  - a. There will be no access from Elsevier to any customer-specific Aries data, including any sales data and customer-specific business requirements.

Discussion: This includes manuscript data, submission counts, business requirements for custom development and configurations. None of this type of data will be shared with Elsevier.

2. Aries will adopt Elsevier Technology standards with local Aries administrators wherever customer-confidential information is involved.

Discussion: Some Elsevier systems, such as HR systems, are used by Aries staff via a separately accessed Elsevier network. Additional technology standards will be adopted, but will remain under the Aries administration. Email storage and administration is handled locally by Aries administrators.

3. Aries and Elsevier need to visibly and proactively demonstrate that it is keeping all customer-specific information confidential.
  - a. Regular audits should be performed, with auditor and audit topics to be agreed by Advisory Board.

Discussion: Aries and Elsevier are committed to visibly and proactively demonstrating that client information is confidential, and this Principle speaks to the role of the Board in that area.

4. All communication and branding should be “Aries” to visibly and proactively demonstrate that the day-to-day business operations are separated.
  - a. This holds for invoices, support, email addresses, business cards, bank accounts, etc.

Discussion: Though a cost savings could possibly be realized in some areas, the decision to visibly show that Aries business operations remains separate was key to this Principle.

5. All Aries customers have an equal opportunity to develop and enhance their own submission environments.
  - a. Prioritization, customer relationships, and cost-management of projects are fully and only Aries’ responsibility.

Discussion: This includes all aspects of the customer relationship, feature pricing, development prioritization, and bug prioritization.

- With principles in writing, they can be distributed in advance of all meetings to set the expectations and make conversation easier.
- In conforming to these principles, there are two areas we are most sensitive:
  - Finance: When Aries was asked for financial information for forecasting, we said no. We will not share that data. We are keeping the firewall. Elsevier will only have access to top-level financials but no details. As part of this, Aries accounts have now reverted from being branded as “Elsevier” back to “Aries”. The account information was always separate, but the branding is important to alleviate client concerns about paying a competitor. We are also maintaining accounting staff in our offices to generate and process invoices to ensure information is not inappropriately shared.
  - End user computing: Though it would be easier to be a part of the central support for tech support, infrastructure, etc., Aries declined and chose to remain on a separate,

protected network with Aries-specific support. This prevents any chance of Elsevier staff gaining access to other client-specific data and information.

- In the event that a request arises to Aries that involves the sharing of any client-related data, an escalation framework has been put in place and was reviewed with the Board. In rare occasions when the acceptance or denial of the request cannot be determined by Aries management, these questions will be brought to this Advisory Board for review and input.

The following Open Question was raised to the Board for discussion:

- Would you be comfortable with Aries sharing the total number of submissions received by Editorial Manager with ALL customers?
- Discussion included:
  - Historically Aries has never reported on number of submissions, number of authors, etc. Aries considers all journal/publisher data to be the data of the client, not of Aries.
  - The purpose for this aggregate information would be to determine what percentage of the market-share is submitted to Editorial Manager versus competitive submission systems. Aries/Elsevier could also monitor submission trends across all titles to monitor submission increase or decreases per selected period.
  - The proposed number is a single total number; not broken down by publisher or publication. Elsevier would not be able to further break down the number to see publisher-specific numbers; any financial information available to Elsevier is also an aggregate number, not broken down by publisher or journal.
  - Concern was voiced that this request is the first down a slippery slope where additional data is requested for publishers. This is exactly why the question is posed to the Advisory Board.
  - The requested statistic is not an interesting number per se, though it would allow individual publishers to determine what percentage of the total EM submissions they account for.
- Conclusion reached:
  - The question will be circulated to the entire Board for further input. As this is an Advisory Board and not a Board of Directors, no formal vote will be taken, but the advice of the board will be considered in the final decision rendered by Jennifer.
  - The final decision will be distributed to the Board as well.

Board attendees requested the following:

- Tracking of Elsevier requests for the Board that are determined to be in violation of the Principles and Aries' responses.
- Would like an additional principle regarding transparency: specifically around communications on when principles are changed, communications on when they are being reviewed, when ad hoc audits are triggered, data sharing is done accidentally, etc. Guidance on how Aries will communicate openly to the Board.

Additional conversations included:

- Elsevier does have access to financial information for any Elsevier-contracted journals. If Elsevier is the contracted owner of a journal, they have access to the data for that journal. This does apply to journals belonging to Elsevier pre-acquisition, and is no different than pre-acquisition. Should a title migrate from Elsevier to another client publisher, Elsevier will no

longer have access to historical data. This is in line with our long-standing, rigorous journal transfer process.

- Discussion of the relationship between Aries and other Elsevier-owned subsidiaries, such as SSRN. The principles apply to relationships between those groups as well. Customer-specific information is not shared with other business units. The Board suggested this may not always be possible, or even necessary (for example, when a tool might be of benefit, such as SSRN), only that in those cases there be transparency (see above conversation about transparency principle).

The Board broke for lunch, and returned to pick up with the Implementation of the Guiding Principles by Kate Horgan:

- The pre-acquisition business model was reviewed. Aries considers a Business Publisher (BP) to be our client. Each BP can have one or many publication titles, but each title has a separate database. Business Publishers can only access data from titles within that BP.
- Each BP is assigned an Account Coordinator (AC) on signing, and that AC is responsible for the relationship from training and implementation to ongoing support. That AC is the primary point of communication with the BP, communicating release information, handling new site creations, coordinating upgrade dates (where possible, all titles under one BP upgrade on the same day), and answering support questions.
- The pre-acquisition infrastructure was reviewed. Over a three-year period, Aries migrated the data centers to a state-of-the-art data center near the offices with a disaster recovery site located in upstate New York.
- The Aries offices moved to a single office location signing a 10-year lease on the new office space.
- The management of Aries represents over 50 combined years of experience with Aries.
- The post-acquisition business model was reviewed. Aries considers Elsevier to be a Business Publisher with regard to publication data. Elsevier can only access data from titles within Elsevier.
- Elsevier has a dedicated support team within Aries. Client Services is hiring new staff to ensure other client support does not feel a negative impact with the expanding support needs. In addition, a team within Aries is working on the migration project for the Elsevier titles. This is a multi-year process, which is in line with the volume of titles onboarding to EM. Volume aside, the support structure for Elsevier is identical to all clients.
- The post-acquisition infrastructure was reviewed. One addition to the management team post-acquisition with the hiring of a new Director of Sales (Jake Kelleher).
- New security measures have been put in place: All visitors (including Elsevier staff) must sign in, carry a special visitors badge that only opens the front door during core business hours (9am – 5pm), be escorted when on premises, and only use public wifi.

Tony Alves continued the meeting with the Development Advantages to all clients from the acquisition:

- In response to the request from the Board in December for a “clear statement on the Single Code Base, including no change in our development process”, Tony presented the statement which can also be found in this file: [Statement on the Single Code Base.pdf](#)
- Some key development advantages were discussed, such as faster feature delivery via continuous code release, additional analytics capabilities, increased GDPR functions, flexibility via APIs, and increased cross-publication functionality.

- Editorial Manager development has always been “crowd sourced” and continues to be. When clients wish to pay for a feature, that development is prioritized. Elsevier features are prioritized in a similar way. All features built become available for all clients in the single code base.

Tony proceeded into discussion of Aries’ Strategic Development:

- Aries remains committed to our strategic development vision we have had pre-acquisition. These priorities and vision are not influenced by Elsevier priorities.
- Such strategic development areas include:
  - Batch configurations
  - Cross-publication ProduXion Manager
  - Repository integrations via API
  - Preprint server integrations
  - Third party quality assurance tools
  - LiXuid

The meeting continued with a Future Preview of the State of the Industry from Cara Rivera of KWF Consulting:

- Cara shared some of the recurring themes in the industry that arise as KWF engages with various clients in publishing. Slides can be found in this file: [KWF Consulting trends talk for Aries 7 June 2019.pdf](#)

The meeting then transitioned to the Industry Strategic Initiatives discussion with the board as a whole.

Discussions:

- Data content and integrity: Content is printed, but content can also be viewed as data and mined as such. Funder information is often provided, but this could be used to determine what percentage of submissions report funding information, how many studies are published against one grant, etc. Data integrity becomes a challenge as well, where information can be incorrect, or multiple IDs can be used for a single entity or person. How can the data be mined, and how can the data be kept clean?
- Open Access: Should OA become the dominant model, what impact will that have on the need for publishers? Contrary to belief, the trend shows that OA or self-publishers still navigate to large publishers to benefit from volume pricing and discounts. May be that publishers become more service-based, along the lines of a purchasing service for smaller journals and societies, such as online platforms and submission systems. Smaller publishers may have a harder time adapting to that sort of ecosystem.  
Is there a place for subscription to OA in the ecosystem? It would be nice, but there is no incentive for institutions to keep it up as there is no return.
- Preprints: As more papers are submitted via preprint and made available ahead of peer review, methods of searching and culling quality will need to adapt (search capabilities, AI tools, etc.). In some disciplines, preprints have been beneficial (scientific astronomy), but in others it is more dangerous (medical). The more prevalent, the more challenging as media/general public view preprint research as vetted when it is not. Can institutions impose better regulations to make preprint research more legitimate?

- Submission Requirements: Commonly raised issue: why do clinical journals have so many submission requirements, and why can't those requirements be consistent across journals or disciplines. Also, requiring more information initially than is needed only to have paper rejected at initial submission is frustrating for authors. Formatting is an example; would be better for authors to need better content and not get bogged down by formatting. Allow formatting to be enforced later, prior to peer review.
- XML First: XML first in EM may allow for the formatting to be handled after submission. Combined with possible "preflight" systems, formatting requirements from Author may be minimized. Formatted output could be HTML or PDF. PDF tends to be the more popular format for reading and downloading, but XML becomes more usable and discoverable. This shift does not seem to be close on the horizon.
- Common Submission Form: Is there an opportunity for a discipline-specific common submission form or format. Concern may exist that having too easy/common a form will result in top tier journals being inundated with submissions. The complexity may weed out some of the less appropriate content in those cases.
- Open Peer Review: Some attendees are starting with isolated experiments with regard to open peer review. Some involve submitting reviews of preprints with submission, some involve publishing of peer review comments with publication. Early results look like this is popular, but too early to tell.
- Challenges: Finding reviewers continues to be challenging. Reviewer fatigue plays a role, and some impacts are being seen. Some report lowering the number of required reviews to ensure enough can be found, others report extended time-to-review due to additional review cycles being required to find enough reviewers. EM integrates with ProQuest, but there was interest in what other reviewer pools could be integrated with EM.

The meeting concluded with the following action items for Aries staff:

- Distribute information on what audits have been completed, executive summaries of audits, and request feedback with regard to gaps to be addressed
- Revisit principles with regard to transparency discussion
- Work on communication plan for reaching out to board with monthly updates
- Distribute notes from meeting for board review
- Distribute the following collateral from this meeting:
  - Cara's slides
  - Operating Principles
  - Single Code Base statement
- Jocelyn Anthony will distribute reimbursement process information
- The next AIAB meeting date and location will be announced as soon as it is confirmed

Meeting concluded around 4:30pm and moved to cocktails, canapés, and conversation until 6pm.