LAK Proceedings Publishing Options

Background

It is timely to revisit the strategic importance to the learning analytics community of how LAK proceedings are published, including a full understanding of the impact on authors of ACM's new open-access publishing model and ACM's process changes with TAPs. It is a good opportunity for SoLAR to understand the strategic value and importance of publishing in the ACM digital library, including templates, process, and communication with authors and whether or not there are other publishing avenues that are of more benefit to authors such as another publisher, self-publishing, or some integration with JLA. There are varying levels of impact, visibility, control, etc., across these possible options.

All LAK conferences to date have been in cooperation with ACM and published in the ACM digital library. From 2021, SoLAR ensured that all LAK proceedings would be fully open access. In 2024, ACM introduced a new publishing model for conference proceedings published in ACM's International Conference Proceedings Series (ICPS). All conference papers published under this new model are Open Access (OA), and *authors rather than conference organizers like SoLAR are responsible for payment*. Please refer to ACM's FAQs for details of the new model.

The majority of LAK papers published in 2024 and 2025 did have at least one author from an ACM Open Access Institution (75% LAK24 and 78% LAK25). For LAK25, this meant that 23 papers had to pay ACM's article processing charge (APC), ranging from 700 to 1000 USD per paper, depending on authors' ACM membership status. There were no applications to ACM for fee waivers under their hardship policy. It may be the case that authors were able to access funds directly from their institutions through already established open-access publishing grants to cover article publishing fees. The following table illustrates the distribution of those 23 LAK25 papers between full and short.

Table 1 - Distribution LAK25 papers

LAK25	ACM Open	Author Payment	Total
Full Paper	53	17	70
Short paper	25	6	31
Total	**78**	**23**	**101**

The possible options for LAK proceedings considered in this initial options paper are:

1. **Remain with ACM**
2. **Move to another publisher, e.g. Springer**
3. **Self-publish under SoLAR proceedings with DOIs**
4. **Special issue JLA**
5. **JLA track and ACM**

Options

1. Remain with ACM

The first option is to keep LAK proceedings published as currently done, as part of the ACM Conference Proceedings series and published in the ACM digital library.

The value of publishing with the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) is widely recognized within the academic and professional community. It might be argued that having ACM as the publisher may have contributed to achieving a high CORE ranking (e.g., A). Publishing with ACM is highly valued, especially by computer science academics and, more broadly, can help individuals across disciplines justify the quality of their publications to their home institutions.

This option, however, does not address the issue of ACM Open Access fees. Using LAK25 as an example the total fees paid to ACM was approximately $23,000 USD. SoLAR already provides financial support for participation in the Doctoral Consortium, conference scholarships, early career researcher grants of $35,000 USD for 2025 and $28,000 USD for JLA. Without significant external sponsorship funds SoLAR does not have the funds to reimburse the open access fees to authors from institutions that are not members of the ACM Open Alliance.

Besides publication costs, the LA community has raised various concerns regarding the publication process with the ACM. These include the ACM template (which uses a one-column template that is subsequently converted to a two-column format), uploading a camera-ready version using TAPS, and the language used in their communication emails (about data and rights). The recent change in the Open Access policy and the fees authors must pay further exasperate this situation. As noted above, no LAK25 authors applied to ACM for any fee waivers.

2. Move to another publisher, e.g. Springer

A second option is to find another publisher, where publication costs could be lower. The first candidate that comes to mind is Springer, given that several other highly valued conferences are published with Springer (ECTEL, AIED). Unfortunately, even higher open access fees exist with Springer, and the fee from ECTEL2024 per individual paper of $2,400. USD is over double that of ACM. Authors also must sign a CC-BY form, which is created for them individually. However, unlike ACM, publishing open access is not required with

Springer, so it would be up to authors to decide if they are willing to pay for publishing open access. Moreover, just like ACM, Springer has open access publishing deals with many universities, meaning that for some authors publishing open access would come at no cost.

In addition to open access publication fees, it is important to examine Springer's publication process and whether it is any better than ACM in terms of proceedings preparation, communication with authors, perceived value to institutions, etc. Based on the experience of ECTEL organizers, authors submit their camera-ready manuscripts directly via EasyChair alongside the standard copyright form. If opting for open access publishing, authors need to contact Springer for an individualized form, with costs for OA publication supported by the authors. The template does not change between the initial submission and the camera-ready version, but it is space-consuming (see example here), potentially reducing the space available for authors. Organizers must manage the entire proceedings preparation process and the communication with the authors, delivering to Springer a .zip file containing the foreword, individual submission PDFs, and source files. Springer's role is limited to cover design and uploading the PDFs without altering them. Challenges with Springer include the requirement for a minimum of three reviewers per paper, potentially high costs for authors, the inapplicability of special university deals to conference proceedings (e.g., Germany's DEAL Konsortium), a space-consuming template that offers less room than the ACM template, proceedings split into 500-page volumes, and a preference for a higher proportion of full papers in submissions.

3. Self-publish under SoLAR proceedings with DOIs

A potential option is publishing LAK proceedings via the 'self-publishing models' by SoLAR with DOIs offered akin to NeurIPS and USENIX models. These models enable authors to share their work via arXiv to promote open science freely. While this option is not linked to established publishers like ACM, this model can benefit in terms of visibility and accessibility through open repositories and DOI indexing. SoLAR already publishes Companion Proceedings for Practitioner papers, Workshops, Tutorials, and posters, so understands the process with the addition of attaching DOIs to the research long and short papers.

While there are benefits, LAK will lose indexing in popular digital libraries. This may have a huge impact on authors as the proceedings publisher is a very important consideration when choosing what conference to submit papers to, determined by what is valued by their institution and what kind of institutional financial support is available to present and attend the conference. LAK researchers are at different career stages, especially with a high number of ECRs, and this option may become less attractive and cause LAK to lose its contributions.

4. Special issue JLA

JLA is the premier publication venue for LA research. Its ranking has gone up in recent years, and it is a Q1 journal. The journal accepts submissions of research papers, data and tool papers, practitioner reports, and extended conference papers. Many academics value publishing in a journal more than publishing at conferences, regardless of the publisher.

JLA rankings continue to climb while LAK proceeding rankings continue to fall from the top 5 to the top 20 educational technology Google scholar rankings.

However, publishing with JLA also has negative implications. JLA published 46 papers (including research papers, practitioner reports and other manuscript types) in 2024. The total number of accepted research papers for LAK25 is 101, more than double that of the JLA papers. Including LAK papers as a JLA special edition might overshadow the contributions of journal papers, effectively transforming JLA into a journal that primarily publishes LAK proceedings. A further consideration is how including short research papers may impact JLA rankings, as the criteria for LAK short papers and journal research articles are quite different. There is also a potential impact on paper searches since it would no longer be in the ACM digital library.

LAK also currently has a CORE A conference ranking, which it could lose by transitioning to a journal publication model. Finally, due to the high cost of publishing an individual JLA paper ($600 USD) and an increased workload on the JLA production and editorial teams, the review and publishing process must remain within EasyChair and overseen by the LAK Program Chairs. Importantly, the papers published in the LAK special issue would not have rounds of revisions nor be copyedited like JLA papers. This further means that about 2/3 of the JLA papers in any year would not be copyedited, but they still would have gone through the conference review, feedback and camera-ready process.

5. JLA track and ACM

This could follow a similar approach as EDM's journal track with JEDM, where full research papers for the journal track are submitted 4–6 months before the conference, whereas papers for the conference adhere to the conference submission deadlines. The papers submitted to the JLA track would be published in the JLA rather than LAK proceedings, and thus, they would not incur any publication costs to the authors but would incur normal JLA paper costs.

Based on the EDM model it is anticipated that only approximately 5% of papers would choose to submit to a JLA track. This could allow for testing workflows and understanding in more detail the challenges of integrating conference proceedings with JLA. It would be a soft launch testing different options for integrating JLA and LAK.

While this offers an alternative to LAK authors concerned about the increasing ACM publishing costs, it does not fully address ACM publication fees, particularly for short papers, as they would not be eligible for the JLA track. Thus, authors who decide to submit short papers to LAK would still be required to pay ACM publication fees. It also does not solve the challenges associated with ACM's complex templating and publication process.

It also segments LAK proceedings - those in the ACM digital library and those published in JLA which may make it more difficult for paper searches from the LAK conference. This also adds additional financial support from SoLAR for the production of papers in this JLA track as they would follow the regular JLA process including review, copy editing and production. Due to the longer submission timeline, it will not be of interest for submitting late-breaking research.

A summary table of all options follows on the next page.

Summary and Next Steps

Learning analytics (LA) community, including SoLAR members (institutional, individual and student); LAK authors for the last 5 years and newsletter subscribers surveyed to gather their views. During LAK25, there will be an online discussion group for further input and in-person discussion during the SoLAR AGM. Based on this feedback, a decision on the proceedings process for LAK26 will be made by May 2025.

Table 2 - Summary options for LAK proceedings

Options / Categories	Reputation and Value to authors, institutions and SoLAR	Process including system, timing and templates	Cost to authors and organizations
Remain with ACM	• Digital library searchable • Recognized by institutions for participation by staff • Important for Computer Science academics • Annual application process (8 weeks) to ACM for inclusion in digital library with no guarantee of success	• Integrates with EasyChair • Understood by previous LAK authors • Complex template for first time LAK authors • Multiple sequential steps often require intervention by LAK/ SoLAR chairs • Timing and steps out of SoLAR's control • Increasing complaints from authors	• Reduced cost to LAK • No financial cost for majority of LAK authors • More institutions joining ACM Open Access • Additional cost to authors not from ACM OA
Move to another publisher, e.g. Springer	• Springer is well regarded and used by other conferences • Has own list of Open Access institutions but further investigation is required to understand if these only apply to journal publications and not conference proceedings	• Authors use same template for submission and camera ready • Integrates with EasyChair • Organizers manage entire process • 3 reviews mandatory per paper • Less text space than ACM template • Maximum 500 pages for proceedings depending on submission maybe multiple proceedings for same conference • Expectation 67% full vs short papers	• Publishing open access not mandatory, however, open access fee more than double ACM's (for institutions without Springer partnership deal)

Self-publish under SoLAR proceedings with DOIs	• Lack of recognition of established publisher • Loss of submissions as not valued by institutions and/or authors • Exclusion from digital libraries affecting visibility of LAK research	• Create own template • Control over process and timing • Includes full and short papers • SoLAR has CrossRef account to manage DOIs • Increased workload for LAK Proceedings Chair	• No cost to authors • Increase cost to SoLAR and LAK conference due to costs for issuing DOIs
Special edition JLA	• While JLA reputation continues to grow it is currently unclear the impact on JLA and LAK. It could make JLA grow, but could also negatively impact JLA with inclusion of short papers and no formal copyediting • Drives LAK paper citations to JLA • Journal publications more highly regarded by many than conference • Loss of appeal for Computer Science academics • Loss of CORE A ranking due to journal rather than conference publishing • Loss of ACM digital library could impact paper searchers • JLA publication numbers are primarily LAK proceedings	• Use JLA existing templates • Follow LAK submission, review and acceptance process in EasyChair	• No cost to authors • Increased cost to SoLAR for publication process
JLA track and ACM	• Limited impact on JLA and LAK rankings since separate publications • It may cause JLA reputation to grow slightly • May cater to those that find Journal publications more highly regarded than conference proceedings • Integration between JLA and LAK • Only appeals to 5% of LAK authors	• Soft launch gives time to understand impact and process • Short papers not eligible • Creates two tier publication for LAK conference • Only addresses a small percentage of authors • More complicated to manage due to both ACM and JLA templates • Much longer submission process and omits late breaking research	• No cost to authors in track • Does not address ACM open access costs for LAK proceedings • Increased costs to SoLAR for publication process • Decrease attendance for LAK presentation as grows to 5 concurrent sessions on some days • No reduction in costs for short paper authors