

Fast-Tracking Neuroscience Research Publishing: Peer-Review Consortium Formed

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Think of this scenario: A manuscript receives favorable reviews from a neuroscience journal but is rejected because of space or scope limitations. The author then sends the manuscript to another neuroscience journal. The second journal contacts reviewers, some of whom reviewed the manuscript for the first. To help to avoid such inefficiencies and speed the publication of neuroscience research, the Neuroscience Peer Review Consortium (NPRC) has been formed.

“The consortium gives authors the opportunity to benefit from good reviews and gives editors the possibility to make a decision faster (if they consider the previous set of reviews appropriate), without wasting time soliciting new reviews from an overworked pool of reviewers,” says Elli Chatzopoulou, the scientific-information and public-relations officer of the International Neuroinformatics Coordinating Facility, at the Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm, Sweden, where the consortium is hosted. “The consortium lifts some workload from the pool of reviewers, reducing the total review rounds of each manuscript when applicable.”

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The consortium, which has been operating on a trial basis since 1 January 2008, consists of 33 neuroscience journals, and five more members are in the process of joining it.

The idea for establishing the consortium was broached at a conference held by the Society for Neuroscience in June 2007. Participants noted the inefficient and time-consuming system of peer review of neuroscience articles. They reported that many solid manuscripts were being rejected because of space limitations or because the articles were not appropriate for their journals. The rejected articles were then resubmitted to other journals. In some cases, editors called on the same reviewers.

Participants observed that authors and readers suffer because the publication of research results is delayed by weeks or months as additional reviews are sought. Moreover, the system wastes reviewer time and overburdens editors, who must spend more time in soliciting reviews from a pool of overworked reviewers.

A working group at the conference, consisting of journal editors and publishers, recommended that the society “establish a pilot Neuroscience Publishing Consortium, initially sponsored by the Society for Neuroscience . . . [and] develop a system of cascading submissions, in which reviews from one journal in the consortium could be passed to the next journal if the paper

were not accepted by the first journal.”

When the idea was endorsed by the other conference participants, the society’s council impaneled the 10 members of the original working group as the Task Force for Neuroscience Publishing with the charge of supervising the formation and initial operation of the consortium during a 1-year trial period.

Since the trial period began, there appears to have been a shift in the timeline. “After consultation with the member journals, the 1-year trial period is felt as too short to allow a thorough evaluation, and the consortium will continue for at least 1 more year,” says Chatzopoulou.

To use the consortium, authors contact the first journal to request that reviews be forwarded to the second journal.

The authors’ use of the consortium is not being monitored directly, but comments have been sought from the participating journals. Chatzopoulou says that “the general response seems to be that the NPRC is covering a small number of manuscripts but requires very little work and does provide a moderate benefit in those cases (saving many, but not all, manuscripts a round of review).”

Chatzopoulou concluded: “So far, feedback from the member journals suggests that the NPRC is having a small but salutary effect.”

Information about the NPRC can be accessed at nprc.incf.org. 