



NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

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Dear Fellow Academy Member:

As the official journal of the National Academy of Sciences, PNAS has always published reports of the most exciting science across a broad range of disciplines while upholding high editorial standards. The Editorial Board and I do so not to chase an artificial impact factor, but rather to serve our readers, the vast majority of whom are not members of the Academy, and to ensure fair and rigorous review of articles published by members and nonmembers alike. The Editorial Board, PNAS staff, and I continually refine our editorial procedures to improve the journal, and I write to highlight some recent revisions.

Standard Procedures for Submitting Manuscripts

The majority of directly submitted (Track II) papers are rejected initially by the Editorial Board to ensure that only papers with a good chance of surviving review are sent out to busy referees and editors. The standard for agreeing to handle and accept a Communicated (Track I) paper should be as high as that for directly submitted (Track II) papers. In addition, members are expected to communicate only papers that are in their area of expertise. Multidisciplinary papers are encouraged and should be reviewed by experts in each aspect of the work. Authors often suggest referees, but the member's knowledge of the field should guide the selection of reviewers. Authors may now also identify a "prearranged editor" for their directly submitted paper. The editorial staff will confirm the member's willingness to serve as the editor and will solicit comments regarding the appropriateness of the paper for PNAS. These comments are then sent to an Editorial Board member who, in the majority of cases, will assign the paper to the prearranged editor.

Manuscripts that are returned to the member editor after significant revision should be re-reviewed by the original referees. When members recommend a paper for publication they should indicate why the work is important and provide the written critiques of all experts who were consulted. If a member disagrees with the remarks of a critical referee, it is crucial that the member provide the Board with reasons to overrule a negative recommendation. In addition, we have adopted the NSF policy concerning conflict of interest for referees (<http://www.pnas.org/site/misc/coi.shtml>), which states that individuals who have collaborated and published with the author in the preceding four years should not be selected as referees.

Many of the same principles apply to papers contributed (Track III) for publication. Two or more appropriate experts, free of conflict of interest and not recent collaborators, should comment on both

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the original and the revised manuscript. All critiques should be returned on the standard PNAS review form. A special obligation applies to a Contributed paper for which the member or his or her co-authors disclose a significant financial or other competing interest in the work. Members of the Editorial Board have expressed concern that the potential for conflict of interest increases when the member selects his or her own referees. With this in mind, and after review by the Associate Editors, the Committee on Publications, and the NAS Council, we are implementing a new policy requiring members who disclose a significant conflict of interest to submit their manuscripts via Direct Submission (Track II). The guideline for such disclosure is described in the PNAS Conflict of Interest Policy (<http://www.pnas.org/site/misc/coi.shtml>). As of January 1, 2009, we will no longer consider such submissions using the Contributed (Track III) mechanism.


Process for Reviewing Submissions

Final decisions on all papers are made by members of the Editorial Board, a policy that has been in place for many years and which was enforced during Nick Cozzarelli's term as Editor-in-Chief. In rare instances, the Board expresses a concern about a Communicated or Contributed paper, most often because the referees are not considered appropriate or the member has not returned a significantly revised manuscript to the referees. If the final decision is delayed, I—or one of the Associate Editors—will notify the member personally. PNAS staff will routinely seek the advice of the original referees on a significantly revised paper that has not been rereviewed. If the original referees are not considered appropriate, however, the Board may suggest additional experts. Previously, these experts were anonymous to the communicating/contributing member. In response to concerns that some members have raised, the Board will henceforth suggest potential new referees who will be consulted only with the communicating/contributing member's approval. In addition, to help the Board decide if a referee has the requisite expertise, PNAS staff will provide a link to that referee's lab or office website. We ask for your help in providing this information during the submission process.

In practice, very few Communicated and Contributed papers are rejected by the Board. Last year approximately 800 Communicated and 800 Contributed papers were submitted, of which only 32 Communicated and 15 Contributed papers were rejected. These numbers are not exceptional by historical standards extending at least the past 15 years.

We deeply appreciate the help of all NAS members as PNAS continues to strive to uphold high editorial standards that will best serve science and society.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Randy Schekman".

Randy Schekman, Editor-in-Chief
*Proceedings of the National Academy
of Sciences*