

Description

One key way to foster diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) in academic publishing is by ensuring that the peer review process remains unbiased and fair. Creating a more equitable landscape ensures that impactful research can originate from anyone, anywhere. A study conducted by Science examined data from over 145 journals and concluded that gender bias is not permeated through the editorial process. In fact, papers written by women scientists are relatively more favored by editors. However, there is a lack of representation from underrepresented regions and minority groups within the peer review process. Biases related to age, career stage, nationality, race, ethnicity, and disability persists in every stage of the editorial process.

While there are ongoing efforts to mitigate these biases and foster DEIA, they often suffer from the side effect of “diversity taxation”. This phenomenon refers to the disproportionate burden on the same individuals from underrepresented groups to drive DEIA initiatives. This over-reliance not only burdens these individuals but also risks amplifying the same voices while others remain unheard. True DEIA in peer review demands a broader, more inclusive effort that distributes responsibility across the entire academic community, ensuring that no single group bears the weight of representation alone. To build a more equitable publishing ecosystem, it is important for us to address these issues at their roots and avoid any pitfalls along the way.

What do you think is the biggest barrier to achieving DEIA in peer review?

Lack of representation among reviewers and Editors

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Strategies and Challenges in Advancing DEIA in Peer Review

Lack of formal policies or frameworks for promoting DEIA



Tracking Representation in Peer Review

Understanding diversity within the current group can help shape the future DEIA initiatives. Collecting data from editors, authors, and reviewers regarding academic position, race, ethnicity, gender identity, and geographic location and publishing timely transparency reports on the diversity of journal editors and peer reviewers is one of the first steps in advancing DEIA within the peer review community.

Challenges:

- Privacy Concerns: Reviewers may hesitate to disclose information due to fear of bias or misuse.

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- Incomplete Data: Data sets may be skewed toward those who feel comfortable sharing information if the survey is voluntary.
- Lack of Actionable Insights: Collecting data without clear action plans to address disparities can make this effort ineffective.



Best Practice: Promote participation in surveys, clearly communicate how the data will be used, and focus on implementing meaningful actions based on the findings.

Reducing Barriers and Expanding Reviewer Pools

Many researchers from underrepresented backgrounds face challenges in engaging with the peer review process due to a lack of formal invitations, time constraints, or unfamiliarity with reviewing expectations. Expanding the reviewer pool by inviting researchers from underrepresented backgrounds, early-career researchers, scholars from diverse geographic regions and identities can enhance inclusivity in peer review.

Challenges:

- Limited Networks: Editors often rely on familiar networks, which may limit the diversity of invited reviewers.
- Lack of Awareness: Many early-career researchers, particularly from underrepresented regions, might be unaware of such opportunities to become reviewers.
- Unequal Workload Distribution: Minority scholars may be overburdened with review requests due to a push for diversity.
- Implicit Bias: Reviewers from underrepresented backgrounds may face skepticism regarding their expertise.

Best Practice: Implement structured reviewer recruitment programs, use AI-assisted reviewer selection tools to reduce bias, and ensure fair distribution of review assignments.

Providing Resources and Training on Bias Awareness and Inclusive Practices

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Offering structured and continuous training through interactive workshops, expert-led webinars, and curated learning resources on topics like unconscious bias, cultural sensitivity, and inclusive language, and equitable peer review practices shall advance the ongoing efforts. Such training programs are important to ensure that participants recognize and mitigate conscious and unconscious biases, ultimately helping us build a fairer and more diverse peer review landscape.

Challenges:

- Superficial Impact: Single-session bias training may not lead to long-term behavioural changes.
- Bias in Training Content: Training designed from a Western-centric perspective may not address the specific challenges faced by researchers in different regions.

Best Practice: Make training a continuous process, integrate case studies, and include voices from diverse global regions in training content. Address region or gender-specific nuances in the training content.



Conducting Reviewer Training and Capacity-Building Programs

Lack of training opportunities prevents many researchers from engaging in peer review. Structured training programs can empower a more diverse reviewer base.

Challenges:

- Unequal Access to Training: Many training resources are available only in English or through paywalled platforms.
- Inconsistent Standards: Reviewers without formal training may evaluate manuscripts based on personal judgment rather than uniform criteria.
- Limited Institutional Support: Universities and research institutions may not emphasize peer review training.

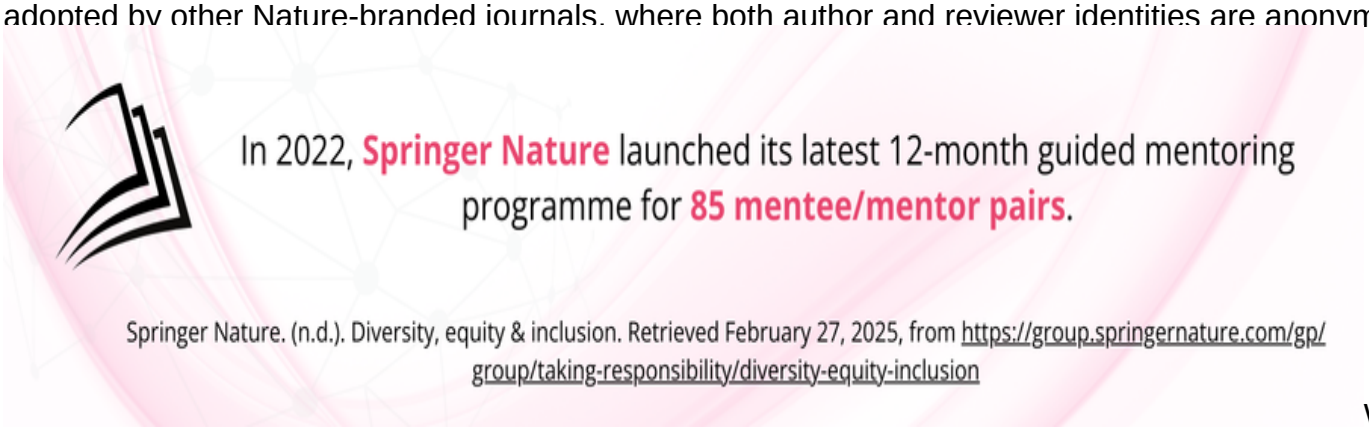
Best Practice: Provide free, multilingual training resources, develop standardized peer review guidelines, and encourage publishers to collaborate with institutions in offering capacity-building workshops.

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Efforts by Leading Publishers

Leading publishers like Springer Nature, Wiley, and APA journals have already begun to take action in fostering DEIA in their peer review processes. Springer Nature provides a course on "Addressing Unconscious Bias" which guides the stakeholders to use inclusive language and offers strategies to improve diversity and inclusivity and editorial board and peer reviewer recruitment. To further mitigate unconscious bias, Nature Geoscience implemented double-blind peer review in 2013, a practice later adopted by other Nature-branded journals, where both author and reviewer identities are anonymized



Wiley has launched 'Wiley's Editor Training Program' program and published its diversity statement and initiatives that are underway to promote DEIA in the journal. Wiley has also appointed a DEIA advisor to guide its efforts and ensure consistent progress across its journals. APA group of journals, on the other hand, has developed extensive toolkits for journal editors to foster DEIA and has publicly released its action plan to champion DEIA.

These initiatives resonate with the idea that achieving true DEIA in peer review requires a shift from surface-level commitments to systemic change. While current strategies aim to address biases and underrepresentation, they often fall short due to incomplete implementation, resistance, and unintended consequences like diversity taxation. A more equitable peer review system demands collective accountability, sustained efforts, and continuous refinement of DEIA practices. By embracing a global, inclusive approach and proactively addressing pitfalls, the academic community can foster a publishing landscape where excellence is recognized without barriers.

Category

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1. Diversity and Inclusion
2. Trending Now

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2025/03/04
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