

Update on the Manuscript Exchange Common Approach (MECA) Initiative

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Caroline Webber, Sr Business Systems Analyst, Aries Systems, spoke about real-world use cases for Manuscript Exchange Common Approach (MECA) on Aries' online submission and peer review tracking system, Editorial Manager. The common problem that this initiative is addressing is the need to have manuscripts transferred from one online submission system to another because of the growing interest within publishing organizations to keep research papers "in-house" while still using the different submission systems employed by publishers. In addition, there is a related issue that MECA addresses which is that authors and reviewers duplicate effort when a paper is rejected from one journal, and then submitted to a different journal. MECA also addresses the rise of preprint servers and the need to transfer papers between preprint servers and submission systems. The goal of MECA is to give journals a seamless process to transfer manuscripts between various systems with minimal requirements regarding what data is transferred. Webber also discussed how to package the communications in a .zip file with various xml files and source files, with the goal of identifying the sources and passing the information from one submission system to another for peer review.

Joel Plotkin, CEO of eJournal Press, discussed how MECA created a set of best practices out of what is already being done, i.e., files are already being used to transfer data across systems. "MECA is all about the technology, the nuts and bolts," he stated, and the goal is to see if this proof of concept will work. He also talked about use cases between publications on different platforms as well as on servers such

as presubmission tools, preprint servers, and subsystems such as eLife. According to Plotkin, lessons learned in creating MECA were that some publications and systems use different naming schemas for first and last name, and the need to ensure the transferred content is secure. He ended his presentation stating that "the trick is finding a standard that a group of heterogenous systems can agree [on]." Plotkin also cautioned keeping in mind policies on General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which include that authors and reviewers reserve the right to transfer to other publications, preprint servers, and services, and that consent must be given when names are included.

Eric Hall, Sr Product Manager, HighWire Press, discussed how best practices are still undefined, and that is why MECA is needed. "MECA is the framework and what goes into the framework is entirely up to the publishers. Every journal has different policies and different needs. MECA is not a one-way trip," he stated. Things can transfer between journals and come back again, but "the hardest thing is getting the policy right, sit down with the affiliated organizations and talk candidly about the kind of data you are comfortable receiving and sending, what is the end goal and how much do you want the author to have to do." Hall continued his presentation on the necessity of content management systems knowing what is important for each party. Regarding preprint servers, he pointed out that bioRxiv receives thousands of submissions monthly and editors want to find a way to move papers from preprint servers to journal submission systems. He continued, if a manuscript is rejected with the option to post a preprint while an author submits it to another journal for consideration, this would be scenario made possible by MECA. Another point he raised is how more journals are doing open peer-review, sharing review commentary alongside the published article, and he believes we will see more of this going forward. The Company of Biologists, for example, sends all peer-review content to Nova Techset and it comes back through MECA. Hall cautions to "think very carefully how you would want to display peer review alongside the published article." Do you show all reviews at each version? Are you going to share reviewer names and the back and forth with authors and reviewers/editors and reviewers/authors, etc.?

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Questions Raised:

- Do you tell the reviewer you are going to share your review? According to Hall and Plotkin, yes, you have to obtain their consent. Plotkin followed up that technology-wise you have to be concrete about what you decide to share. Webber indicated that there are questions built in—and believes they are modifiable—that allows reviewers to answer if they want to have their review shared, if they are okay with their name being shared, etc. The framework is in place, but we are also learning from the publishers themselves.
- What are the timelines to the next milestones? The NISO approval and making it viable on the systems? The NISO group is working through the specifics of implementation and, if everything goes well and all 15 organizations involved agree, will send it to NISO for a vote as recommended practice, summer 2019. According to Alves, the “recipe” is ready for use.
- What is the cost of using MECA? There is no cost to use MECA, but there may be a cost to configure a system. With a Creative Commons CC BY license, anyone can use it with attribution.