

# Utilizing Engagement Strategies to Resolve the Crisis in Finding Reviewers

## MODERATOR:

### Jason Roberts

Senior Partner  
Origin Editorial

## SPEAKERS:

### Randy Townsend

Peer Review & Publishing  
Origin Editorial  
@rantowns

### Melecia Miller

Scholarly Support and  
Engagement Coordinator  
Origin Editorial

## Marina Broitman

Director of Peer Review  
Patient-Centered Outcomes  
Research Institute  
@pcori.org

## REPORTER:

### Raquel Wilson

Editorial Assistant  
Western North American  
Naturalist  
Brigham Young University

available for training reviewers with accessible, on-demand material (e.g., Origin,<sup>1</sup> ACS Reviewer Lab,<sup>2</sup> Elsevier's Researcher Academy,<sup>3</sup> Wiley's Peer Review Training<sup>4</sup>).

Given that peer review is primarily volunteer-driven, it is critical to understand the incentives that drive reviewers. Are peer reviewers motivated to complete better-quality reviews more frequently because they receive monetary compensation, seek better qualifications as a researcher, or want access to a journal's content? Townsend explained that when a journal understands what motivates their reviewers, it is easier to customize rewards and incentives, making contributors feel appreciated and encouraging them to review again.

Townsend also emphasized the importance of fostering a diverse and inclusive academic community. Increasing representation in the peer review process is one way to ensure that diverse opinions and perspectives are included. Journals should seek to implement the principles of IDEA, an acronym Townsend created that stands for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility. When journals strive to reduce bias in the peer review process, this establishes trust and equity between the reviewers and the journal.

## Training as a Form of Engagement

Training is a helpful tool in engaging reviewers in the peer review process. In her presentation, Melecia Miller, a scholarly support and engagement coordinator from Origin Editorial, covered various training efforts, possible reviewer rewards and incentives, and methods to measure the success of engagement initiatives.

There is a significant difference between training and mentorship. Melecia Miller explained that training is a more self-paced approach with take-home material that a peer reviewer can do to learn the basics of peer review. Training is beneficial as it allows a journal to tailor the experience by creating a list of reading material, objectives, or pretraining/posttraining surveys for the reviewer. After completing basic training, reviewers can then enter a mentorship program in which an experienced individual guides the reviewer through the review process.

Miller then shared some tips on how to design a mentorship program. She brought up several ways that mentorship can also be tailored to the individual,

## The Crisis

The session "Utilizing Engagement Strategies to Resolve the Crisis in Finding Reviewers" took place Tuesday morning at the 2024 CSE Annual Meeting. Jason Roberts, a senior partner at Origin Editorial, started the session by introducing the panel speakers and topic. In a world where innovations and changes seem endless, peer reviewers are not. Peer review is an essential step in validating the legitimacy of scientific information before articles can be published. Each article published in a journal requires reviewers with specific expertise and experience, making it a constant battle to recruit and adequately train peer reviewers to produce high-quality reviews. This results in extreme reviewer fatigue, which poses a significant challenge for journals. In this session, 3 speakers provided practical tips and innovative solutions for supporting and building lasting connections with reviewers.

## The Opportunity

Origin Editorial's Randy Townsend started the session by stating, "Where there is crisis, there is opportunity." He explained that journals can build trust with their reviewers by being transparent, clearly communicating expectations, and providing appropriate tools and training. During his presentation, Townsend highlighted several resources

<https://doi.org/10.36591/SE-4703-08>

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Figure. Incorporating patients into the process. Credit: PCORI.

including suggestions such as determining the duration of the mentorship cycle, collecting feedback, facilitating group mentee discussions, and providing appropriate incentives. Miller noted there is no need to reinvent the wheel when creating a program and provided a useful list of potential questions for a reviewer evaluation form.<sup>5</sup> When implementing a mentorship program, journals should consider how mentors will communicate with mentees, have a system to identify which manuscripts were reviewed by a mentee, and establish clear expectations for reviewers.

Proper incentives and rewards work hand in hand with training to prepare reviewers and keep them motivated. Miller specifically mentioned the American Society for Radiation Oncology's (ASTRO's) piloted program that highlights reviewers in their journals who have completed multiple high-quality reviews on time. Incentives and rewards will be different for every reviewer, whether it is a tangible reward like a gift card or recognition. She recommended that journals focus on early career researchers, as they already have a built-in incentive for becoming a peer reviewer. Early career researcher reviewers benefit by staying up to date with active research, building meaningful relationships with colleagues in their field or societies, and gaining qualifications or continuing education credits in their discipline. Meanwhile, journals gain more reliable reviewers and on-time, high-quality reviews for articles.

## Engaging Lay Reviewers

Medical journals can overcome the challenge of finding reviewers by involving patients in the review process. Marina Broitman, director of peer review at the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI),<sup>6</sup> covered this topic as the last speaker of the session. PCORI is an independent, nonprofit research institute that funds research that strives to help patients make well-informed medical decisions. When patients and advocates are incorporated into reviews, they become research partners that can peer-review funding applications, journal articles, and much more (Figure).

Broitman highlighted some of the benefits of including patients as reviewers, mentioning that they have lived experiences, diverse opinions, and can help improve dissemination of research findings. However, the challenges of incorporating patients into the review process include finding patient reviewers with sufficient time, aligning their goals with the journal, and addressing their limited knowledge of the scientific content. PCORI addresses these issues by engaging patient peer reviewers with user-friendly resources and training modules online, and by having an advisory board that handles mentorship and support. Overall, involving patient reviewers provides unique perspectives that can significantly enhance the review process when balanced with scientific evaluations as well.

## Takeaways

Even though there are many challenges with finding reviewers, there are also various solutions and tools to help strengthen peer reviewer–journal relationships. By providing appropriate training and incentives, peer reviewers will be better equipped to produce more frequent, high-quality reviews.

## References and Links

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