Paper Review Coordinator Instructions

Each Year TRB’s volunteers review well over 5,000 papers, approximately 3,000 of those papers are presented at the TRB Annual Meeting and nearly 1,000 papers are published. This is only possible because of the work of paper review coordinators like you. Your assistance in the review process is appreciated by the TRB staff, our volunteer leadership, authors, and the transportation community. This document will provide general information about the paper review process; specific steps to accomplish that process are found in the Review Management Users Guide for MyTRB [include link to IT document here].

TRB holds online tutorials for authors, paper review coordinators, paper reviewers, and session organizers. The schedule for upcoming webinars and the archived recordings of past webinars are available on our website. Participating in or viewing these webinars will help you understand the paper review process and its role in Annual Meeting session planning. There are also several resource pages associated with the paper review process and Annual Meeting planning - Authors, Paper Review Coordinators, Paper Reviewers, and Session Organizers. Each of these includes a brief overview and a list of resources for more information. Paper review coordinators should be familiar with the direction provided to authors and reviewers.

Paper Content and Review Confidentiality

TRB conducts a single-blind paper review. This means that the authors do not know who reviewed their paper but the reviewers know the authors of the paper they review. It is critical to maintain this separation between authors and reviewers during and after the process. In addition, the authors do not know which committee is reviewing their paper until after the process is complete.

Papers reviewed by TRB and the review results are confidential and should not be shared with anyone except the paper review coordinators, paper reviewers, paper author(s) and TRB staff. This restriction applies both during and after the review process. The papers that have been included in the AM Online website or published in the TRR journal may be referenced, but the review results must never be shared.

The Review Schedule

The TRB paper review process is fast and there are no “do overs.” The September 26/October 1 deadlines for all paper decisions and session details is absolute. The major steps and schedule of the paper review process are as follows, with some additional information; detailed step-by-step instructions can be found at [link to IT document]:

- **June 1-August 1**: The paper submission site is open. All papers must be submitted by the end of the day on August 1.
- **June-July**: Update the reviewer pool(s). Communicate with your reviewers about the upcoming schedule, their responsibilities, and resources for reviewers. Some reviewers have completed the “areas of expertise” within my TRB, and some committees also conduct reviewer expertise surveys to better assign papers to the most qualified reviewers. Your staff officer can provide sample surveys. It is important to work with your TRB staff officer to make sure the reviewer pools are correctly set up and the correct people have paper review coordinator rights to each page. The Primary Reviewer Pool is the Pool linked to a TRB standing committee. Some committees also may have Specialty Reviewer Pools. A Specialty Reviewer Pool may be connected to the standing committee’s subcommittee or focused on special topics or a call for papers, set up simply to share the paper review coordinator role among one or more other volunteers. This process also is typically used by committees with well over 100 papers to review.
- **Mid-July to mid-August**: TRB staff officers assign papers to committees. A majority of the papers are submitted in the last few days of July. Although TRB staff begin assigning papers in mid-July, most papers are assigned to committees after August 1. Paper review coordinators can see the papers tentatively assigned to your committee throughout this time period. Paper will continue to move and the assignments are not final until mid-August. You are encouraged to look through the papers and report any problems to MyTRB@nas.edu. You cannot assign reviewers until mid-August.

- **By August 15**: Perform a “triage” for the papers assigned to you to verify those that should be reviewed by your reviewer pool, identify any that would be more appropriate for a different committee, and reject any papers which should not be reviewed at all. Although staff also perform a triage process, they cannot look at each of thousands of papers in detail so it is incumbent on the review coordinators to take a closer look and communication as soon as possible with staff officers if there is an issue. Some issues to consider:
  - **Appropriateness of each paper for your committee**: If you have been assigned a paper that is outside the scope of your committee or reviewer pool, let your staff officer know as soon as possible so that the paper can be reassigned.
  - **Conflict of interest**: Conflicts of interest can arise in a number of situations. A few examples include: an author is also a committee chair or a paper review coordinator and therefore has the ability to assign his or her own paper to reviewers or at least know who is reviewing the paper; the authors are closely connected to the review coordinator or the research has been funded or directed by the review coordinator; a review coordinator has a strong bias regarding an issue and assigns papers on theory x only to people who advocate theory y; a reviewer or review coordinator handles a paper touching on a technology for which they have a patent or earn royalties. If you are concerned that handling the review of a particular paper could present conflict of interest issues, communicate as soon as possible with your staff officer so that the paper can be reassigned.
  - **Adherence to paper submission rules**: Authors have to read and accept a very clear set of requirements before submitting their papers. Rules relate to maximum word count, format, English grammar, marketing of commercial products and services, advocacy, etc. Although TRB staff officers try to weed out the papers that violate TRB paper rules, some of these papers may slip through and be assigned to committees. Papers that violate paper submission rules should be rejected without review; please inform your staff officer if you come across papers in this category.

- **By August 17**: Assign paper to the correct reviewer pool and assign reviewers to each paper. If your committee is using Specialty Reviewer Pools your first step needs to be allocating/checking the assignment of the papers to the Primary Reviewer Pool and any Specialty Reviewer Pools. Paper review coordinators can make these assignments or TRB staff can assist with this step. A minimum of three reviews is required for acceptance of a paper but some papers should receive more reviews if necessary to get a balanced perspective or cover a number of subspecialties. Avoid assigning too many papers to a reviewer so that the reviewer’s perspective does not have too much influence over the papers presented and published.

- **By September 15**: All reviews must be complete. It is critical to monitor the completion of reviews and remind reviewers of the paper review deadline. The TRB software can generate standard reminder emails but paper review coordinators also have the option to send out personal emails, or get help from the committee chair and TRB staff officer. This help will typically be in the form of an email reminding reviewers of their responsibility to help with the paper review process.
• **By September 26:** Make review decisions (see next section) and sent to TRB staff officer. TRB will inform the committees of the acceptance rate for publication (typically around 20% of the papers reviewed for publication) and for presentation (typically closer to 60% of the papers reviewed for presentation). Give yourself plenty of time to make these decisions – you inevitably will encounter reviewers with dramatically different opinions on several papers. The system provides an overall weighted ranking (OWR) for the papers – this is a summary of the numerical reviewer ratings. The OWR is a useful ranking, but the reviewer comments should be the true basis for your decision. The publication limit is adjusted slightly to account for the different number of paper submissions each year and then is strictly enforced. If you recommend more than the limit, TRB will decide which papers to; please avoid this problem by communicating with your TRB staff officer.

**Review Decisions**

Once papers have been through review, several decisions need to be made:

• **Presentation decisions:** For those papers submitted for presentation, a decision about whether and how to present must be made. Papers can be presented in a lecture session, poster session, workshop, or committee meeting. Each paper accepted for presentation must be slotted into one of the committee’s Annual Meeting events and, therefore, presentation decisions must be made in conjunction with the committee’s overall plans for the Annual Meeting. Typically about four papers are presented in each lectern session, with time for audience questions. The paper sessions count against the committee’s available Annual Meeting session slots. Poster sessions do not count against the committee’s slots.

• **Publication decisions:** Review of papers submitted for publication results in one of three decisions by September 26: accept for publication without re-review, request revisions and re-review, do not publish.

  • **Accept for publication without re-review:** A paper that was highly rated and for which reviewers made relatively minor suggestions may be accepted for publication without requiring re-review. The reviewer comments will be sent to the author and the author will determine the extent to which he or she will incorporate the reviewer comments. The author will submit a final manuscript by November 15 to TRB for publication.

  • **Request revisions and re-review:** A paper that is good but requires improvements can be returned to an author for revisions. The author will be required to submit the revised paper by November 15 and the committee will have until January 31 to make a final publication decision. While a decision to request revision and resubmittal for re-review is not a guarantee of eventual publication, it should not be requested of authors who have little chance of being accepted in the end. In other words, “revise and resubmit” implies a high probability of publication.

  • **Reject for publication:** Papers that do not have a high probability of publication should be rejected for publication at this point. Rejection can be based on poor quality, a need for too many revisions to expect an improved paper by November 15, or a high degree of competition among papers (a pretty good paper may not make it in a year of very good papers).

• **Practice Ready Designation and Paper Award Nominations:** Paper reviewers are asked if the paper should be considered for a paper award and if the paper should be considered “practice ready.” Their recommendations will be passed along to you and you will need to make a final decision on recommending the paper for an award or practice ready status. Information on TRB paper awards can be found on the TRB award webpage: [http://www.trb.org/AboutTRB/Awards1.aspx](http://www.trb.org/AboutTRB/Awards1.aspx). Additional information on practice ready papers can be found at [http://prp.trb.org/](http://prp.trb.org/).
Send Review Results to Corresponding Authors (By October 15):
These review result emails can be sent any time after your staff officer has given the go-ahead. The TRB system will generate an email based on your publication and presentation decision. The email will include the reviewer comments. You are welcome to personalize or otherwise edit the email. TRB staff suggests reading through the reviewer comments and deleting any personal or unprofessional comments. This rarely happens, but when it does, it can be counterproductive, unprofessional and unnecessarily hurtful. You will start getting inquiries on the review results if they haven’t been sent by October 15th.

Resubmitted Papers and the Re-review Process (November 20 to January 31)
Any author whose paper has been accepted for presentation, publication or re-review may submit a revised paper by November 15. The revised papers (or original papers if a new one isn’t submitted) are included in TRB AMOnline.

Authors with papers selected for re-review must submit new versions of their papers for re-review and another document outlining the changes they made in response to the reviewers’ comments. Most committees will not consider re-review papers for publication if the authors have not submitted both of these files. There are several ways to conduct a re-review, beyond the process supported by the TRB review software. Please contact your staff officers to discuss the options. The decision process, conversation with your staff officer, and the notification email all happen similar to the initial review process.

Final publication decision (February 2)
If you did not choose to re-review any papers (selected only yes or no for publication) you do not need to do anything in January. If you did re-review some of your papers, you will need to make the final publication decisions (within the 20% limit), consult with your staff officer, and send a final results email to the authors.

Publication Process – After Your Input is Complete
- Staff officers assign the papers to specific volumes of the TRRs, most often based on subject
- An email is sent to the corresponding author with the final decision
- The authors submit the final paper in the publication format by March 15

Author Complaints
The authors are not initially told which committee has been assigned the review responsibility for their paper. The review results email will include the reviewing committee name and the paper review coordinator’s name. After this email goes out, you may hear back from the authors with complaints. Authors often complain that the paper was assigned to the wrong committee. Since the paper assignment process is managed by the staff officers, we will respond to these complaints. Please forward those emails directly to your staff officer. The other type of complaint will be a disagreement with the reviewers or the decisions. If you are comfortable responding to this type of complaint, you are welcome to do so. However, if the author continues to argue or if you are not comfortable responding, please feel free to pass the email along to your staff officer.

Closing
Thank you again for your help. As no doubt became obvious in the text above, the paper review process is an intense burst of work for the authors, TRB staff, paper review coordinators, and reviewers compressed into a short timeframe. Communication is the key to accomplishing all this in a timely, ethical, and professional manner. Keep in touch!