

Publication Committee Ethics Process Recommendations
Approved by the SRCD Governing Council
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Sub-Committee Members

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Sub-Committee Charge

This Publication subcommittee was charged with developing a process for responding to publication-related concerns involving (a) conflicts of interest, (b) alleged ethical violations, and (c), potential legal liability related to submitted or published manuscripts. This charge was issued in response to the recommendations from the SRCD Task Force on Publications and Ethical Behavior (found in Section 1), and builds on the work of prior Publication Committees that drafted a preliminary proposal for addressing such issues (found in Section 2).

In fulfillment of this charge, the current Publication Subcommittee developed a set of procedures that differentiate among these issue types, clarify the scope of review, and define a structured process for organizational response. These recommendations include the formation of a new body, the *Publication Ethics Sub-Committee*, to be housed within SRCD's Ethics Standing Committee. The responsibilities and structure of this new sub-committee are outlined in Section 1 of this report.

Table of Contents

1. CURRENT RECOMMENDATION FOR POLICY TO ADDRESS CONFLICT OF INTEREST, ETHICAL VIOLATIONS, OR POTENTIAL LEGAL LIABILITY IN THE PUBLICATION PROCESS.....	2
2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR CURRENT RECOMMENDATION.	8
3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: APPROACH DEVELOPED BY PRIOR PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE (for Context and Background only)	9

1. CURRENT RECOMMENDATION FOR POLICY TO ADDRESS CONFLICT OF INTEREST, ETHICAL VIOLATIONS, OR POTENTIAL LEGAL LIABILITY IN THE PUBLICATION PROCESS

The following outlines the current recommended policy and process for addressing conflicts of interest, ethical violations, or potential legal liability in the publication process. These procedures are designed to ensure transparency, fairness, and consistency while protecting the integrity and autonomy of SRCD journals.

This process should be limited to instances when a conflict of interest or ethical violation arises as identified by an editor, author, or other members of SRCD in good standing, or when a potential legal liability has been identified. It is important to note that this is *not* a venue for overturning editorial decisions about accepted/rejected manuscripts. As articulated by [COPE](#):

“A conflict of interest (COI) is defined by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) as existing ‘when professional judgment concerning a primary interest...may be influenced by a secondary interest’. COIs are considered inevitable. In fact, everyone involved in the publication process could be affected: authors, reviewers, journal editors, guest editors, and manuscript editors, as well as other journal staff and service providers.”

Ethical violations—such as breaches of confidentiality, undisclosed authorship conflicts, or failure to adhere to established research integrity standards—may also arise at any stage of the publication process and warrant careful, impartial review.

COIs, ethical violations, and other issues may lead to potential legal liability at any stage of the publication process. To the extent possible, the sub-committee aims to protect editorial autonomy and will work cooperatively with Editors to support the mission of the SRCD journals.

Who Can Raise a Concern?

See Figure 1 for a detailed flowchart describing how manuscripts are reported to the *Publication Ethics Sub-Committee*.

Specifically, Editors/Co-Editors are solely responsible for managing *Author Conflict of Interest and Ethical Violations* relating to author disclosures of interest that could influence the research. This includes but is not limited to *financial interests* (i.e., funding, grants, or personal financial gains from organizations that may benefit from research outcomes), *employment* (i.e., current or recent employment relationships with organizations or institutions that may have an interest in the study), *consulting roles* (i.e., consulting services provided that could impact the research), *personal or professional relationships* (i.e., friendships, family, colleagues, or other close

association that may bias the work or decision-making), or *patents or intellectual property* (i.e., ownership or application of patents related to the research). When Associate Editors are involved in decisions regarding *Author Conflict of Interest or Ethical Violations*, they must submit their recommendation to the specific Editor or Co-Editor managing the case for approval. In instances where a journal has a Co-Editor structure, the Co-Editor involved may consult with their fellow Co-Editor, though such consultation is optional and the final responsibility for managing *Author Conflict of Interest and Ethical Violations* rests with the Co-Editor managing the case.

Editors/Co-Editors are also solely responsible for managing *Reviewer Conflict of Interest and Ethical Violations*, which includes the items listed above under Author Conflict of Interest and Ethical Violations, as well as conflicts and ethical violations related to *competitive research* (i.e., direct competition with the authors or their research, such as working on a similar project that may benefit from early access to the manuscript) or *breaches of confidentiality* (i.e., using unpublished manuscript information for personal or professional gain). When Associate Editors are involved in decisions regarding *Reviewer Conflicts of Interest and Ethical Violations*, they must submit their recommendation to the Editor or Co-Editors for approval. In instances where a journal has a Co-Editor structure, the Co-Editor involved may consult with their fellow Co-Editor, though such consultation is optional and the final responsibility for managing *Reviewer Conflict of Interest and Ethical Violations* rests with the Co-Editor managing the case.

Editors/Co-Editors are responsible for ensuring they do not have any of the conflicts of interest or ethical violations outlined above. In cases where such a conflict arises, the Editor/Co-editor may identify and empower an Co-Editor, if one is available, or an Associate Editor to make all decisions for the relevant manuscript. In instances when a Co-Editor or Associate Editor is not available to take responsibility for the manuscript, the Editor is required to bring the manuscript to the *Publication Ethics Sub-Committee*, employing the process outlined below.

The Editor or Co-Editor must also raise a manuscript with the *Publication Ethics Sub-Committee* when they are concerned about reputational damage to the organization. In instances where a journal has a Co-Editor structure, the Co-Editor involved may consult with their fellow Co-Editor, though such consultation is optional and the final determination about raising a manuscript when are concerned about reputational damage to the organization rests with the Co-Editor managing the case. In such instances, the Editor or Co-Editor is required to outline the scientific merits of the manuscript, as well as explain their concern about how the manuscript may be of concern to the organization, and include their recommendation for moving forward if they have any.

Any other member of SRCD in good standing may raise concerns about conflicts of interest or ethical violations directly with the *Publication Ethics Sub-Committee*, particularly if they are concerned that a conflict of interest or ethical violation has not been adjudicated fairly. Examples

of such third parties may include co-authors not formally listed on the manuscript, former students or collaborators, editorial board members, readers who identify concerns, or organizations and companies whose products or programs are under evaluation; this list is illustrative rather than exhaustive. Whenever possible, concerns should first be raised directly with the Editor or Co-Editor. If the concern remains unresolved, the Editor or Co-Editor is directly implicated in the concern, or if there is evidence of Editorial mishandling, the member may bring the issue to the *Publication Ethics Sub-Committee*. Examples of editorial mishandling may include failure to disclose an editor's own conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality in the review process, inappropriate sharing of manuscript materials, or clear deviation from established journal procedures; this list is illustrative, not exhaustive. Please note that evidence of bias or mishandling by the Editor must be provided in such cases. Concerns unrelated to conflicts of interest or ethical violations—such as disagreements with editorial decisions—do not fall within the scope of this process. In instances related to author, reviewer, or editorial conflict of interest or ethical violations, the sub-committee will present a binding determination about the conflict of interest or ethical violation when 80% agreement is reached among sub-committee members. If the sub-committee fails to reach the 80% threshold after the second meeting, a *non-binding* recommendation will be shared with the Editor or Co-Editor for instances of conflict of interests and ethical violations. (see the Process section for additional details of the sub-committee's role when the 80% threshold is not met).

In instances where a publication-related legal liability concern arises—including, but not limited to, a formal threat of a lawsuit—identified by the Editor or Co-Editor, members of the Governing Council, or other organization leadership, the issue must be raised with the *Publication Ethics Sub-Committee*. The sub-committee will consult with the organization's legal counsel. Final decisions regarding how to address potential legal liability rest with the organization's leadership in coordination with legal counsel. In these instances, the sub-committee's role is advisory with the goal of assessing publication-related conflict of interest, ethical violations, or other concerns, and will provide a non-binding written recommendation to assist in organizational decision-making.

In summary, a manuscript with potential publication-related conflicts of interest, ethical violations, or legal liability issues may be brought to the attention of the Publication Ethics Sub-Committee by any SRCD member in good standing at any point in the publication process (e.g., during initial submission, while under review, after acceptance, or following publication).

Concerns may also be raised by a) SRCD leadership, including members of the Governing Council; b) Society's legal counsel; c) Editors; or d) others directly involved with the manuscript, including affected authors and associated parties (e.g., a principal investigator whose name appears on a manuscript submitted without their consent).

Sub-Committee Composition

We recommend establishing a five-member *Publication Ethics Sub-Committee*, as part of the Ethics Standing Committee. The sub-committee will comprise three (3) members of the Ethics Standing Committee, one (1) member of the Publications Committee, one (1) former Editor or Associate Editor of one of the Society's journals. The Editor of the relevant journal will participate in discussions as a non-voting member.

- This sub-committee should meet at least once a year to receive a primer on the charge of the sub-committee and reaffirm their continued commitment to serving in this role. Individuals should not serve on this sub-committee for more than three years.
- The chair of the sub-committee is selected from among the committee members and selected by the chair of the Ethics Standing Committee
- It is recommended that the sub-committee maintain a monthly one-hour standing meeting, which may be canceled if not necessary.
- The prior Editors or Associate editors eligible to serve on the sub-committee must not have overlapping terms with the current Editor(s)

Process

To raise a concern—whether before or after publication— a written summary of the concern must be submitted to the chair of the *Publication Ethics Sub-Committee*, along with either the manuscript or, if already published, a citation of the article in question.

The sub-committee chair will communicate with all sub-committee members and alert them to the said manuscript; the chair will also communicate with the relevant editor or Co-Editor (if they are not the individual submitting the concern) to obtain all additional relevant information about the manuscript (e.g., reviews, editorial decisions, etc).

The sub-committee will meet at the next monthly meeting to discuss the issues raised and identify any additional information necessary to make a decision on a specific manuscript; as noted earlier, the Editor or Co-Editor of the relevant journal will be a non-voting member included in these discussions.

- In cases involving a legal liability (e.g. an external entity threatens to sue SRCD for an already published or soon-to-be-published manuscript), relevant information will be gathered from the SRCD legal counsel.

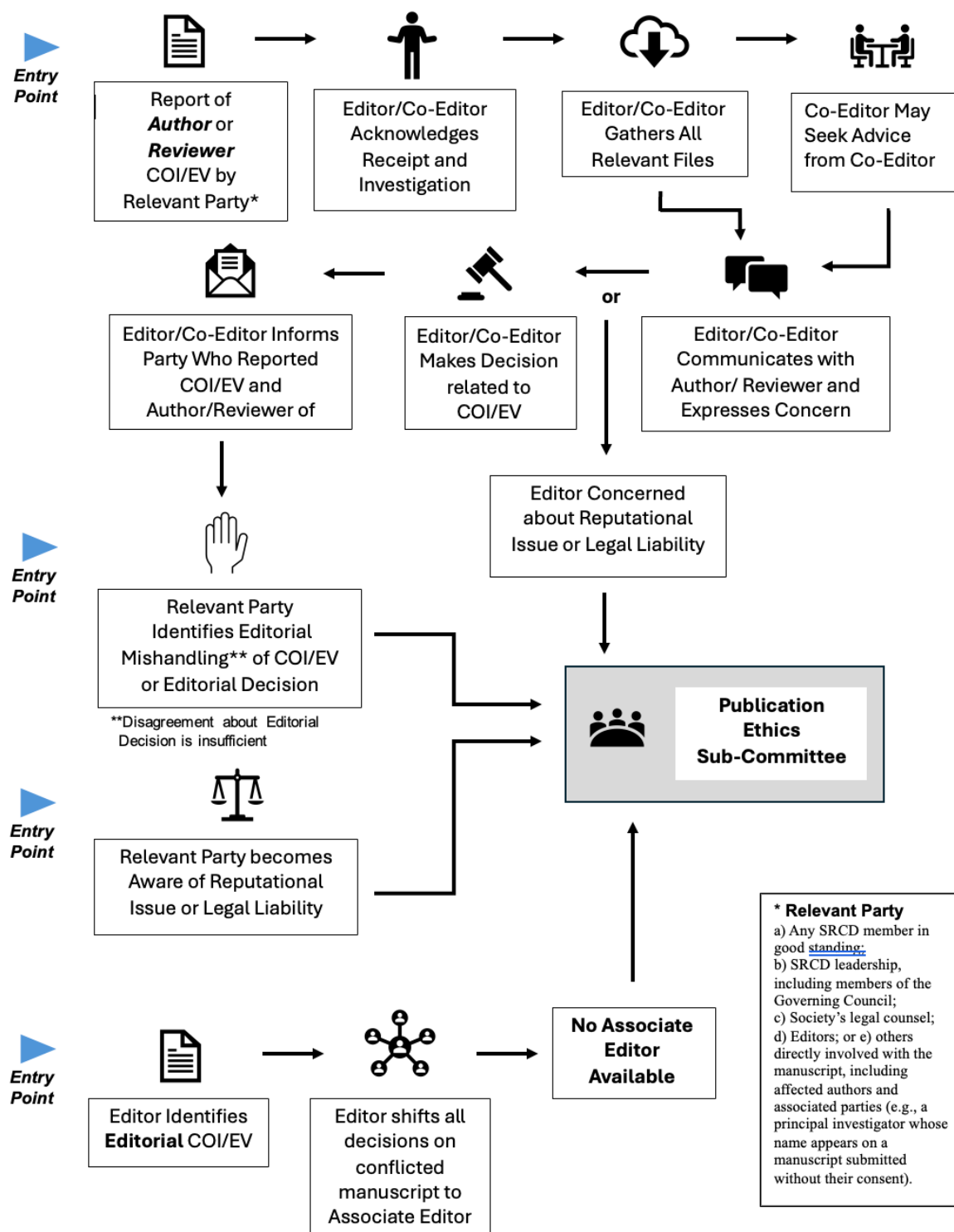
Ideally, all recommendations will be reached with the consensus of all voting members. However, at least four of the five voting members (80%) of the sub-committee must endorse the final binding recommendation for cases related to publication-related conflicts of interest or ethical violations. In cases where there is one dissenting member, such dissent will be noted in the final report. If the sub-committee does not initially reach the 80% threshold, the chair will

reconvene the group for an additional deliberation to address any unresolved concerns. Following this second meeting, a final vote will be held. If the sub-committee does not reach the 80% agreement threshold after a second meeting, it will provide a non-binding recommendation to the Editor or Co-Editor in cases involving conflicts of interest or ethical violations; however, the final decision rests with the Editor or Co-Editor. As noted earlier, the sub-committee's role for all recommendations for publication-related legal liability issues are advisory, and final decisions regarding how to address potential legal liability rest with the organization's leadership in coordination with legal counsel.

Recommendations may include but are not limited to requesting additional peer review, recusal of conflicted editors or reviewers, requiring disclosures, delaying or declining publication, or recommending correction or retraction of a published article.

- The sub-committee chair will write a report (including a 1-summary of the issue, 2-information gathered, 3-conclusions and associated explanations) to the editor or co-Editor, as well as any other relevant party, within 3-4 months of the identification of the said manuscript, unless additional time is needed and documented.
- Any party directly involved in the process—including the party who initiated the report—may submit a final appeal to the *Publication Ethics Sub-Committee* within one month of receiving the final report. Any appeal must include a clear rationale that specifically challenges the conclusions and explanations presented in the report. The sub-committee will make a final decision within 2 months of the appeal. As with the original recommendation, at least four of the five voting members (80%) must endorse the final decision for it to be binding. If the 80% threshold is not met following deliberation, a non-binding response will be provided to the appellant and relevant parties.

Figure 1. Flowchart describing how manuscripts are reported to the *Publication Ethics Sub-Committee*



Note. COI—conflict of interest; EV—ethical violations; See [COPE](#) flowcharts for handling different aspects of publication ethics issues. “Editor” refers to the Editor(s) raising the concern.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR CURRENT RECOMMENDATION.

To provide historical context, we have included below an excerpt from the SRCD Task Force on Publications and Ethical Behavior ([link to report](#)). This material reflects the initial recommendations that prompted the Publications Committee to begin developing a more formalized policy for handling manuscripts with potential (a) conflicts of interest, (b) alleged ethical violations, and (c), legal liability related to submitted or published manuscripts. The excerpt is not part of our final recommendation but rather illustrates the concerns and priorities that motivated this process—namely, ensuring that SRCD had a clear mechanism for addressing conflicts of interest, ethical violations, and potential legal liability in publication. By presenting this background, we aim to show the origins of the current recommendations and the rationale for refining them into the policy now outlined in this document.

**Note that the excerpt below was directly copied from the SRCD Task Force Recommendations and does not reflect the current recommendation; those can be found on page 2 of the current document*

For additional information, including context leading to this recommendation, please see the full task force [report](#), attending to the “Editorial Recommendations” section found on pgs. 19-22.

The Publications Committee should develop a process for handling manuscripts that violate publication policies or ethical standards of SRCD or raise potential legal liability issues. For example, the PC might establish a new committee comprised of SRCD members with deep publication experience but not currently involved in governance. That committee would review evidence about a particular manuscript presented to them by the PC and be prepared to make a recommendation to the PC about said manuscript. The essential features of this process in our view would be to put any investigation in the hands of experts on publications and publication ethics and with the capacity to act promptly. The editor of the manuscript in question must be involved in the entire deliberative process. If such a process is developed, it should be included in editors’ contracts. At the very least, it should be clear in the contracts who has the authority to intervene and make decisions about manuscripts that violate policies. The Task Force is not advocating suppression or over-scrutinizing of manuscripts that address controversial issues. Controversy can be good for a field when it stimulates productive dialogue about complex issues. The recommendation should only be applied to manuscripts that violate policies or raise potential legal liability issues for the Society.

3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: APPROACH DEVELOPED BY PRIOR PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE (for Context and Background only)

The outline reproduced below represents a historical artifact from the work of a prior Publications Committee, which we reviewed as part of our deliberations. While it does not represent the current recommendation, it provided useful background and insight into how earlier committees conceptualized handling conflicts of interest and ethical concerns. Our current policy builds on this history by refining and formalizing procedures to ensure clarity, consistency, and alignment with best practices.

Note that the outline below was directly copied from the work product of prior publication committee members and **does not reflect the current recommendation; those can be found on page 2 of the current document*

The following outlines the consultation process developed by PC members Martin Ruck and Chris Ohanessian, and voted on by members of that committee: 7 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain (Tina Malti, Nora Newcombe, Chris Ohanessian, Debbie Rivas-Drake, Martin Ruck, Dawn Witherspoon, Tiffany Yip) based on notes found in the archived document “6 SRCD COI Workflow Steps for Addressing Alleged COI Violation_RecommendtoGC 9.14.20.pdf” shared with the subcommittee by Melissa Lutchkus.

- Editor-in-Chief of the journal for the alleged COI violation submits all relevant information in writing to a newly-formed Ethical Conduct Standing Committee.
- The Publications Committee suggests that this committee comprises 2 members who are not in SRCD leadership positions, 1 Publications Committee liaison, and 1 additional member.
- A “rapid response” approach should be adopted for the work of this committee due to the rarity of these cases.
- The Ethical Conduct Standing Committee assesses submitted evidence, investigates, and makes a decision within 3-6 months, preferably as soon as possible.
- Decision of the committee is sent in writing to Editor-in-Chief of the journal for the alleged COI violation.
- Editor-in-Chief of the journal for the alleged COI violation relays the decision to the author(s) in writing.

The prior committee also outlined three points for further consideration:

- All decisions should be made based on consensus, but if consensus is not achieved (i.e., “hung jury”), then what should be the next steps?

- One possibility is that a hung jury means it was not determined to be a violation.
- What is the appropriate time frame for the consultation process?
 - PC thought 3-6 months was reasonable but should certainly be expedited to the extent possible.
- There should be a mechanism for authors to appeal the committee's decision. - Should this be an appeal to GC?