

# Changes to ITAL Peer Review Process

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*If you have reviewed this document and the [linked job descriptions](#) document, and approve of the recommendations, please add your name here. If you have questions or concerns, please leave comments so they can be discussed.*

*I have reviewed and approve of this proposal:*

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# Background

Over summer 2020, through the work of the Core Publications Working Group, it became clear to ITAL's editor that ITAL's peer review process differed from that of the other two journals (*Library Resources and Technical Services* and *Library Leadership & Management*) that would merge to form Core, and from many other peer-reviewed journals as well. ITAL submissions are reviewed by one reviewer per article, almost always by a member of the Editorial Board. The few exceptions are when there is not a Board member with an appropriate subject expertise or when an editorial board member is already undertaking multiple reviews, an increasingly frequent occurrence.

After a discussion of this difference at the ITAL Editorial Board's 23 September 2020 meeting, a working group comprised of editor Ken Varnum and Board members Brady Lund and Cinthya Ippoliti was charged as follows to explore this issue and, if warranted, propose a change in ITAL's publishing practice for full Editorial Board and Core Executive Board comment and approval.

Over a series of four meetings in October and November, the working group:

- Reviewed our charge to understand the issues to be researched;
- Conducted an environmental scan of peer publications to understand their processes;
- Affirmed the desirability of having two peer reviewers per submitted article;
- Developed a new job description for a "reviewer" and outlined consequent changes to the existing Editorial Board Member job description;
- Outlined a transition plan to get from our current organizational structure to the proposed new structure, and a regular process once the transition was complete.

## ITAL Peer Review Working Group Charge

The proposed ITAL Peer Review Working Group is charged to make a recommendation to the full ITAL Editorial Board about changing our review process and answer at least the following questions:

1. Should ITAL move to having two people consider each article?
2. How would this decision affect the work of the current Editorial Board?
3. If additional reviewers would be needed, provide details on how the reviewing group could be expanded, considering (at a minimum) scope of submitted

articles, diversity of reviewers, the definition of any new roles needed, and the kinds of initial training and ongoing support that would be needed.

4. If two reviewers are considering each article, should at least one of them be an Editorial Board Member?
5. If complimenting the peer review process with reviewers, should they serve a term similar to an Editorial Board Member?

The Working Group's recommendation is due to the ITAL Editorial Board by January 22, 2021, for consideration at the scheduled January 27, 2021, meeting.

## Environmental Scan

We selected 8 peer journals: C&RL, JMLA, Code4Lib Journal, Journal of Web Librarianship, Journal of Library Administration, JASIST, Weave, and Reference & User Services Quarterly. Of those journals with a peer review process, all but two used two referees in a double-blinded process (the Code4Lib Journal has an open review process with multiple reviewers).

See the [Environmental Scan spreadsheet](#) for full details.

## ITAL's Reviewer Model

ITAL has built a reputation as being an authoritative scholarly journal. However, with the existing small pool of a dozen reviewers who have the responsibility of being gatekeepers for all the journal's scholarly content, there are several challenges. The first challenge is largely logistical. From 2015-2019, ITAL received 390 submissions and published 88. Of the approximately 300 submissions that were not published, roughly 100 were rejected through peer review (the remaining 200 were deemed out of scope prior to review or had other significant problems and did not start the peer review process). The number of articles reviewed per year has more than doubled, from 55 in 2015 to 114 in 2019. Doubling the number of reviewers assigned to each reviewed submission would overly burden the existing editorial board, particularly when there is often only one editorial board member with expertise in an article's topic.

A second, harder to quantify, challenge, is the diversity of reviewers across any number of dimensions. Opening the review process to a larger range of reviewers would enable several positives:

- We would have a more diverse pool of reviewers, more broadly reflecting our readership;
- We would have more access to a wider range of subject expertise;
- We would live up to typical standards of peer review better than we do now, making it harder for one reviewer's conscious or unconscious biases to effect publishing recommendations.
- We would offer career development and participation opportunities to more members of Core.

## Assistant Editor

A new Assistant Editor role would be created. This person would have primary responsibility for managing the expanded peer-review process but would also be expected to assist the Editor with copy editing and layout of accepted content. The Assistant Editor position would come with a stipend of \$1000/year.

## Updated Job Descriptions

To define the new role and redefine the existing editorial board member role, we propose a new Reviewer job description, a revised Editorial Board member job description, and a new Assistant Editor job description. See [Job Descriptions for Editorial Board Members and Reviewers](#) for full details.

A larger pool of reviewers (perhaps 20-25) would be enlisted (see [Transition](#), below) and would, collectively, be the group that has primary responsibility for reviewing submissions and providing feedback and recommendations to the Editor. Editorial Board members who so choose may continue to routinely review submissions, but this would no longer be their primary responsibility.

In the event of a split decision by the two reviewers, an Editorial Board member would review the article and offer a final assessment of the manuscript that may be used to help the editor make an appropriate decision.

Editorial Board members must be members of the Core division. Editorial Board members serve two-year terms, renewable for a total of four consecutive years on the Board, and are responsible for deciding matters of policy and practice of the journal.

Reviewers do not have this requirement (although Core members will be preferred when review opportunities are shared). Reviewers serve indefinite terms, but have an

annual opportunity to renew or stop their membership, through communication initiated by the Editor or the Editor's designee on the Editorial Board.

## Transition from Current to New Process

Once this proposal has been approved by the ITAL Editorial Board and the Core Executive Committee, the Editor or the Editor's designee(s) will publicize a call for reviewers. (Elizabeth Nelson, the incoming editor of Core's *Library Leadership and Management* journal, is also looking to expand that journal's reviewer pool, so a joint call for reviewers will be issued; Mary Beth Weber, editor of *Library Resources and Technical Services*, has sufficient reviewers for their needs at this time.)

Once a pool of reviewers has been identified for ITAL, they will be trained on both the mechanics of using our journal publishing platform and on how ITAL reviews are conducted. This documentation will be maintained for future cohorts.

Starting with submissions received after the cohort is in place, tentatively May 1, 2021, the ITAL Editor will assign two reviewers per article rather than the current one per article, and will draw on the self-stated expertise of the reviewers to make assignments, with preference given to reviewers who are Core members where practical. ITAL Editorial Board members may, at their discretion, continue reviewing articles, and will begin to be the third reviewer in the event of split decisions.

With the approval of the ITAL Assistant Editor position, a selection committee consisting of the ITAL Editor, one representative each from the *Library Leadership & Management* and *Library Resources and Technical Services* editorial boards, and two representatives appointed by the Core board, will develop and publicize a call for interested individuals, determine selection criteria, and appoint the first Assistant Editor to start on July 1, 2021.

## Proposed Workflow

Steps with changes are in *italics*

<b>Step</b>	<b>Responsible</b>	<b>Description</b>
Submit article	Author	
Gatekeeping Review	Editor	Determine if submission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is in scope for ITAL</li> <li>• Meets minimum standards for written English</li> <li>• Ensuring a blind review by de-identifying the text as needed</li> </ul>
<i>Assignment for review</i>	<i>Editor or Assistant Editor</i>	<i>Assigns to two reviewers</i>
<i>Tracking review process</i>	<i>Editor or Assistant Editor</i>	<i>Ensuring that timelines are met (6 weeks)</i>
<i>Performing peer review</i>	<i>Reviewer</i>	<i>Completing provided forms and offering appropriate feedback (positive and negative) to the editor and the author about the content of the article</i>
<i>Assignment for tie-breaking review in the event of a split decision</i>	<i>Editor</i>	<i>Assigned by the editor in the case of a split recommendation</i>
<i>Performing tie-breaking peer review</i>	<i>Editorial Board member</i>	<i>Completing providing forms and offering appropriate feedback (positive and negative) to the editor and the author about the content of the article</i>
Communication of results with author	Editor	Merging all feedback and communicating decision (accept, accept with revisions with or without an additional review round, reject) and rationale to the author
Layout & Copyediting	<i>Editor/Assistant Editor &amp; author</i>	Layout of article in ITAL format, copyediting, working with author to ensure changes are negotiated

Proofreading	ALA Publication Services	Proofreading
Final review	Editor & author	Reviewing and accepting final changes
Publication	Editor	

# Working Group Meeting Notes

October 13, 2020

1. Review charge and tasks
  - a. We view our task as figuring out the implementation details; the board seemed generally on board.
  - b. We could focus on implementation and coordination with the other two Core journals
  - c. Try not to barrage our colleague editors & reviewers with too many questions -- sort out what we want to ask, and ask
2. Organize into reasonable order
  - a. Should ITAL move to having two people consider each article?
  - b. How would this decision affect the work of the current Editorial Board?
    - i. Initial thoughts.... Reviewers are a pool, whose function is reviewing articles as requested & appropriate
    - ii. Editorial Board sets policy, direction, strategy
    - iii. Editorial Board members *may* review articles
    - iv. Editorial Board terms stay fixed
    - v. Reviewers serve at will (theirs, editor's)
    - vi. Need to set job descriptions for each, explain roles
  - c. If additional reviewers would be needed, provide details on how the reviewing group could be expanded, considering (at a minimum) scope of submitted articles, diversity of reviewers, the definition of any new roles needed, and the kinds of initial training and ongoing support that would be needed.
  - d. If two reviewers are considering each article, should at least one of them be an Editorial Board Member?
    - i. Requiring a Board member to review each article may be a bottleneck, and may lead us to reject articles that don't fit the Board members' expertise
    - ii. If the Editorial Board wants a role in approving/reviewing the slate of articles, that could be built in; the editor could propose a slate of articles (out of all available), with Board review. Likely 6 months before publication.
    - iii. What happens when two reviewers disagree? Who mediates -- editor, a 3rd reviewer, an editorial board member?

- e. If complimenting the peer review process with reviewers, should they serve a term similar to an Editorial Board Member?
- 3. Plan next steps before our next meeting (10/27/2020)
  - a. Environmental scan (based on review of websites or other available materials; interviews can come later):
    - i. Questions to ask/investigate
      - 1. How are they structured
      - 2. Who reviews articles
      - 3. What are timelines
      - 4. How selective are they (acceptance rate, if on website)
      - 5. How much work do different models require (follow up with editors, if we can establish the model they use)
      - 6. How much of a “review” role do editors put in?
      - 7. What is the added load on editor to mediate differing reviewer opinions?
    - ii. Who are our peers
      - 1. CR&L
      - 2. JMLA
      - 3. Code4Lib Journal (?)
      - 4. Journal of Web Librarianship
      - 5. Journal of Library Administration
      - 6. JASIST
      - 7. Weave
      - 8. Reference & User Services Quarterly
- 4. Homework for 10/27/2020 meeting
  - a. KEN: Create a place to record the environmental scan data
  - b. ALL: Select up to 3 journals from the above list and fill out as much information as you can on the [Environmental Scan](#) spreadsheet.

## October 27, 2020

- 1. Review environmental scan
  - a. What stands out?
    - i. Other journals have two reviewers
    - ii. One (Code4Lib JOurnal) has open reviews
    - iii. Journal of Scholarly Publishing (not quite LIS) is a single double-blinded review; reviewed by 2 editors) -- from Brady
  - b. What needs follow-up
    - i. No need for follow ups at this time.

- c. Is there a model we think would make sense?
    - i. We do want to move to two reviews.
      - 1. Move to a pool of reviewers, beyond the Editorial Board
      - 2. Need to state expectations -- how many reviews/year, for example, are expected.
      - 3. How to ensure that reviewers get the work done?
      - 4. Does Board get a new role, with less emphasis on reviewing; with a new reviewer role?
      - 5. Reviewers would need training, what do cohorts look like?
      - 6. Reviewers could be at will -- with a periodic checkin to ask if they're still interested
      - 7. What happens to the Editorial Board role?
        - a. Some journals have a tiered approach -- section/topic editors who manage the reviews, synthesize them, pass them to the editor
        - b. Editor maintains screening role
        - c. Board could take on a great role with screening, or a column
- 2. Current job descriptions
    - a. [Editorial Board member](#)
    - b. [Editor](#)
    - c. Reviewer -- what would it look like?
  - 3. ...
  - 4. Homework for 11/10/2020 meeting
    - a. Update job descriptions
      - i. Cinthya and Brady to draft a reviewer job description by next meeting
    - b. Put together a workflow of how it is, and how it would be
      - i. Ken: write up and share current workflow by 11/3.
        - 1. See [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1G8edOP1L8qsClT\\_w20QdsQ33quM7zNLbRZRKfxLP6fQ/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1G8edOP1L8qsClT_w20QdsQ33quM7zNLbRZRKfxLP6fQ/edit?usp=sharing)
      - ii. Ken: contact other Core journal editors to let them know ITAL is going to call for reviewers within Core; do they want in on the action?
        - 1. LL&M are interested (follow up with Elizabeth Nelson <[enelson@mchenry.edu](mailto:enelson@mchenry.edu)>, incoming editor, and Joe Salem <[jsalem@msu.edu](mailto:jsalem@msu.edu)>, outgoing editor).

2. LRTS (Mary Beth Weber <[mbfecko@libraries.rutgers.edu](mailto:mbfecko@libraries.rutgers.edu)>, editor) says they are set and don't need to join the pooled call for reviewers.
5. Future work:
- a. Once we are ready to invite new reviewers, draft an invitation message & intake form.

## November 10, 2020

1. Review [workflow](#) (Ken)
  - a. No comments
2. Review proposed reviewer job description (Cinthya Brady)
  - a. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ea8Y6hsalyfNoN-gpc7M04Me4-rgC-rat3VmJGG-Vqv4/edit?usp=sharing>
    - i. Terms of service of reviewers; how long should they be (or should there be a term)?
    - ii. When would we bring on new members?
    - iii. Is Core membership required for the review panel? It might help us build diversity (on many fronts) if we did not require Core membership.
    - iv. What is the level of formality of the review panel?
3. Updates about other journals' interest in a joint call for reviewers (Ken)
4. Next steps (All)
  - ~~a. Ken: pursue follow-ups with Core/Tabby~~
  - ~~b. Keep 11/24 meeting of this group; we will wrap up process & job description based on answers Ken gets from Core about membership of reviewers~~
  - ~~c. Ken: merge November/December ITAL Editorial Board meetings into one, in early December~~

## November 24, 2020

1. Discuss responses about reviewer roles
  - a. Core Executive Committee says, "We're good with trying to find an external reviewer who is a member first but then offering the opportunity to a non-member if a member can't be found."
2. Finalize [job description](#)
  - a. Terms of service

- b. Staggered/rotating/for life
- 3. Frame proposal for discussion at Editorial Board meeting (December? January?)
  - a. What updates needed to Editorial Board membership job description?
  - b. Joint call with LRTS for reviewers

Editorial Board members may review articles; key responsibilities focus on strategy, direction of journal.