

Appendix D: Procedures for Reviewing Papers and Technical Notes

The main responsibility of the Publications Committee is to manage the *Journal of Geotechnical and Geoenvironmental Engineering* (JGGE). A group of five people act as Editors of the *Journal*: the Editor in Chief and four Editors.

The procedure for reviewing papers is as follows:

1. The author or authors send five copies of the manuscript to the G-I.
2. The G-I keeps one copy, generates review forms, and sends the remaining four copies plus review forms and relevant correspondence to one of the five Editors. The G-I picks the Editor based on his or her areas of general interest, but sometimes a paper is moved to another Editor.
3. The Editor selects an Editorial Board Member (EBM) to handle the review. Before sending the material on to the EBM, the Editor asks the EBM by phone, FAX, or email whether he or she is willing to undertake the task. If the EBM is too busy, he or she should not hesitate to decline the opportunity; the Editor will find someone else.
4. If the EBM agrees, the Editor will send him or her three copies of the paper, copies of the review forms and the summary review form, and in some cases other relevant material. The EBM must then arrange for outside reviews.
5. The preferred procedure is for the EBM to find two outside reviewers who do not belong to the same organization and, preferably, do not belong to the EBM's organization. It takes two "accepts" to accept a paper and two "declines" to decline it. Therefore, the EBM often acts as a tie-breaker. Some EBMs have been in the habit of sending papers out to only one outside reviewer and doing the other review themselves. This is fine as long as the two reviews agree, but it creates a messy situation when the EBM and the single outside reviewer disagree -- the tie-breaker is then an outside reviewer. There is nothing to prevent the EBM from sending the paper to more than two outside reviewers, and it is often done when the paper is expected to be controversial. Also, it alleviates the problem of the reviewer who fails to perform. Again, it takes two to accept and two to decline.
5. When the EBM has the reviews in hand, he or she completes the summary review form, summarizing the important points in the reviews and making a recommendation. If the EBM is acting as a tie-breaker, the EBM should not use this form for the tie-breaking review but should complete a separate review form with the review and summarize all the reviews on the summary review form.
6. It is essential that the EBM talk to the reviewers, or communicate with them by FAX or email, before sending them the paper for review. The EBM should try to get a commitment for a prompt review. We would like the EBM to turn the paper around in 45

days. If the reviewer does not come through, the EBM should find someone else to do the review and not wait around for someone who is not producing.

7. The EBM sends the completed summary review form, the completed review forms, and any marked copies of the paper to the Editor who sent the paper to the EBM. It helps if three copies of the forms are sent.

8. The Editor will take a look at everything. If he/she concurs, he/she will write directly to the author informing him or her of the decision and giving any appropriate advice. In almost all cases the Editor goes along with the EBM's recommendation. The names of the reviewers and the EBM are not divulged to the author(s).

There are now six possible outcomes of the review process: accept the paper as is, accept it with suggested revisions, accept it with required revisions and re-review of the revised manuscript, decline it, decline it with encouragement for the author(s) to revise and re-submit the manuscript, and decline it with encouragement to revise it and submit the revision as a technical note. The Editors are trying to revise the forms but are having some scheduling problems at ASCE. The new forms will combine the first two outcomes because they are essentially identical and will eliminate the last one because it is usually an impractical crutch for reviewers who have a hard time saying "no." Therefore, EBMs and reviewers are urged to consider only four alternatives: accept (with suggested modifications if any), accept with required revisions and re-review, decline, and decline with encouragement to revise and re-submit.

If a paper is accepted with required revisions and re-review or is declined with encouragement to revise and re-submit, it is almost certain that a revised manuscript will be sent in. The Editor will send it on to the same EBM to handle the next round of reviews, so the EBM can expect to see the revised versions of papers for which revisions are required.

There is a subtle but important difference between a paper tentatively accepted with required revisions and re-review and paper declined with encouragement to revise and re-submit. Obviously, in both cases the author is told to fix the paper and in both cases the reviewers can find that the fixes are not adequate. However, technically a paper accepted with required revisions is an *accepted* paper. The EBM can review the revised manuscript, decide that the authors have done what is needed, and recommend acceptance without further outside reviews. The EBM can also decide that the paper should receive another full round of reviews. A paper declined with encouragement is a *declined* paper. The revised manuscript must receive at least two favorable new reviews, so it has to go out to the reviewers, even though they do not have to be the same as the ones who reviewed the first version.

Getting good reviewers is not easy. EBMs should try to avoid inexperienced people. Reviewers should have gone through the review process themselves and have published some refereed journal articles. It is a good idea to pick reviewers with somewhat different backgrounds. It is also important to be sensitive to the great importance of independence -- real and perceived -- in the review process.

Papers in review and the names of the reviewers and EBM are confidential. The author(s) will not be told who the EBM or reviewers are. The EBM is not to release or in any way use the

results of the paper until it is published. Copies of the manuscript should be returned or destroyed.

There is usually a meeting of the Publications Committee about once a year to discuss the whole range of issues facing the journal. Often they are held at geotechnical specialty conferences, where a number of the EBMs can be expected to show up. The Editors confer by conference telephone call about every six to eight weeks.