

JGR Biogeosciences

EDITORIAL

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Key Points:

- The impact of our journal is enhanced when a representative pool of contributors participates in the process of scientific publication
- Increasing reviewer and editor diversity is the best opportunity we have to remove bias from the peer review process
- Key priorities to expand and diversify our editorial, reviewing, and publishing community are highlighted

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Statement of Contribution to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for *JGR: Biogeosciences*

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Abstract Here we are presenting a statement of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) for *JGR: Biogeosciences*. This statement includes current policies and practices, and details concrete actions that we intend to implement over the next year to better include underrepresented groups in the publication process.

We strive to attract the broadest possible approaches and perspectives to the study and development of biogeosciences. Diversity, equity, and inclusion strengthen our biogeosciences community, including those that read, edit, publish in, and review for, *JGR: Biogeosciences*. The relevance and impact of our journal is enhanced when a truly representative pool of potential contributors participates in the process of scientific publication. We seek to publish high-quality biogeosciences research that originates from and involves the broadest possible community spanning a full spectrum of scientific thought, including those who may not currently engage therein.

As Editors we have the responsibility to decide who is asked to review and whose research ultimately gets published. We recognize this is an important role and do not take it lightly. It is our duty to ensure that authors have equitable access to fair, respectful, and unbiased reviews. Similarly, we also must ensure that expert reviewers can be found from across the entire community. With this in mind, we have generated this statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), which we hope will guide you to join us in proactively engaging with promoting DEI across our journal editorial activities.

We are writing this statement to outline our position and intent in a clear, transparent, and public way to improve DEI policies and practices for *JGR: Biogeosciences*. This statement includes our current practices and details concrete actions that we intend to implement over the next year to better include underrepresented groups in the publication process. It is not a perfect nor a static vision, and we hope you will help us keep evolving and improving. Our promise to you today is to revisit this DEI statement annually, to report on our key priorities, successes, and challenges, and to set new actions and milestones.

1. AGU's Commitment to DEI Across Publications

AGU recently committed to [review DEI across its publication portfolio](#). This includes broad policies such as transparent recruitment procedures for Editors-in-Chief (EiC), term limits for EiCs and [AGU Editors](#) (herein referred to as Editors) as a means to increase diversity, a clear [scientific ethics and publications policy](#) and being a signatory of the [San Francisco Declaration of Research Assessment](#).

We are fortunate to be able to consult and collaborate with the [AGU Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee](#) and [Publications Committee](#). AGU staff collect and analyze baseline data across programs including gender, career stage and geographic location of authors and reviewers for *JGR: Biogeosciences*. We use this data to ensure that reviewers and authors represent the breadth of our scientific society, to identify gaps in participation by underrepresented communities, and to guide our policies and practices. This data is important for us to set targets and actions. As AGU expands the types of data it collects, we encourage authors and reviewers to complete their profile and communicate with AGU on ways to improve the surveys.

2. Aiming for a Diverse Editorial Board

We believe that the editorial board must represent the diversity of not only current, but of potential authors. We currently have 40% female representation on the Editorial Board as well as members of different career stages. Our Associate Editors (AE) are based in Australia, China, Israel, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, Republic of Korea, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, as well as Canada and the USA. We are committed to improving on this diversity, in particular by increasing AEs from outside of North America and Europe.

The success of our journal is attributable in large part to our dedicated and enthusiastic editorial board. To that end, we maintain a long list of potential AEs that we refer to when we need to replace an AE or add expertise. We add names to this list as required based on journal needs (i.e., growth in a subject area) and upcoming retirements. Submissions for AE to this list are typically from recommendations from the current editorial board, self-nominations, and from our pool of outstanding reviewers. Associate Editors are then carefully chosen by consensus between the EiC and the Editors - all while considering primarily the expertise needed, the gender balance and the demographics (mainly geographic location, and when known, race, ethnicity, and career stage) of the current board. We welcome nominations, including self-nominations, for AEs at any time. AE recruitment typically occurs near the end of the calendar year (November). Interested individuals are hereby invited to contact the EiC or one of the Editors.

3. How We Select Peer-Reviewers

Reviewers are typically selected by the AE with the most relevant expertise. Finding peer reviewers is one of the most challenging and time-consuming tasks we face as editors. We consider the following when inviting peer-reviewers: expertise needed for the submitted article, conflicts of interest, willingness to meet a deadline, “reviewer fatigue” (how many times they have reviewed in the recent past), and where possible and known by the AE, demographics. AGU's data shows that the reviewer pool diversity increases with AE diversity and consequently becomes more representative of the biogeosciences community.

The current data tell us that there is limited representation of published research from certain geographic locations (e.g., South America) and that we need to improve diversity of our authors and reviewers in certain subject areas. In response, we have in the past offered targeted workshops on publishing in our journal. For example, we offer webinars on publishing and reviewing in [Spanish](#) and English, and we work closely with an editorial staff based in China who helps us recruit authors and reviewers from China's scientific community.

4. A Delicate Balancing Act: Peer-Review Is Prone to Conscious and Unconscious Biases

We believe that peer-review is an important part of ensuring the quality and reliability of our publications. We value this process, especially when the volunteer reviewer is an underrepresented member of our community. We have a bit of work to do still to properly analyze review biases. So far, we have found no statistical difference in “agree to review” rates based on author institution ranking, gender, and geographical location using a single-year analysis of 2019 AGU data. But we do acknowledge that the peer-review process (including the EiC, Editors and AEs) is prone to biases. Our editorial board knows that it needs to focus on the scientific merit and quality of our papers, and the Editors aim to be fair and respectful with every paper submitted. We recognize that fair standards are difficult to assess but Editors are always open to discuss how to improve equity in the peer-review process.

At this time, [increasing reviewer and editor diversity is the best opportunity we have to remove bias from the peer review process](#). Currently, we do not believe we are a good candidate journal for double-masked reviews since anonymity would not be guaranteed when meeting the FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reproducible) [data standards](#) or for regional field-based research (both are important for our journal). At the submission stage, authors can identify reviewers that for any reason should not review a paper and our policy is to honor these requests. In our experience, inappropriate and aggressive reviews are rare. On the few occasions when they do occur, an Editor together with an AE, will either remove or call out language deemed to be disrespectful. We will now formalize this policy over the next year.

5. Key Priorities for *JGR: Biogeosciences*

With the above in mind, we seek to expand and diversify our editorial, reviewing, and publishing community as follows:

1. Adopt a more transparent recruitment process for Editors.
2. Formalize a policy to ask authors to adopt more inclusive citation practices.
3. Improve the diversity of invited reviewers by encouraging AEs to select reviewers from beyond established, close-knit research communities.
4. Update our guidelines to reviewers and authors (when they respond to a reviewer) to remind them that their tone needs to be respectful and appreciative.
5. Ensure that all our associate editors have received training in the awareness of bias or discrimination in peer review.

As we continue to seek new insights regarding the interaction between living and geophysical systems through the biogeosciences, we acknowledge that key advances may well arise from research communities not yet sufficiently engaged in our editorial and publication processes. Consequently, we welcome feedback from scientists throughout the broadest possible range of backgrounds and perspectives, and remain committed to updating our approach to expanding and diversifying our biogeosciences research community. Please contact us at jgr-biogeosciences@agu.org to share your thoughts and experiences.

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