



## Ethical Guidelines for Special Issues

Ensuring Transparency, Integrity & Accountability in Academic Publishing

Doc. No.: SG-EGSI-25-01-01

# 1

### Defining Special Issues & Their Purpose



- Special Issues should address **specific, emerging, and timely research themes**, not broad or generic topics. They must contribute meaningfully to scientific progress rather than serve as **profit-driven** volumes for publishers.
- Guest Editors must have expertise in the field and be well-established in their area of research**, with no conflicts of interest (COI) with the topic or contributors. A team of Guest Editors may also include early career researchers to work under the leadership and guidance of senior Guest Editors for capacity building, but this percentage should not exceed 50% of the team. In such cases, the assignments handled by early career researchers must be supervised by the senior members of the team.

**Example of a COI\* with the topic:** A Guest Editor with significant financial ties to a company that manufactures a technology being critically discussed in the Special Issue would have a COI with the topic. This financial interest could bias their editorial decisions and undermine the credibility of the Special Issue.

\*COI: Conflict of Interest

# 3

### Preventing Conflicts of Interest in Author Selection



- Authors of Special Issue papers must have no prior collaboration with the Guest Editors** in any capacity, including:
  - Co-authored publications
  - Joint grant applications
  - Student supervision
  - Visiting professorships at each other's institutions (applies to both Guest Editors and authors)
- There should be no COI between authors and Guest Editors at all**, without any specific time window.
- Any non-commissioned submissions that fall under this category must be redirected** by Guest Editors to the **journal's Person in Charge of Special Issues or the Editor-in-Chief**, to be handled **outside the jurisdiction of the Special Issue and its Guest Editors**.

# 2

### Transparent Guest Editor Selection & Editorial Oversight



- Guest Editors must undergo a **transparent selection process**, with **editorial boards actively vetting** their expertise and affiliations.
- Special Issue proposals should be **publicly documented**, including objectives, editorial criteria, and COI disclosures.
- Journals must **monitor Guest Editors' editorial decisions** to prevent favoritism, fraud, or manipulation.
- The number of Special Issues a journal is allowed to have should be proportionate to the number of regular issues they publish, with a suggested cap of no more than 25-30% of the total number of regular issues annually.**

# 4

### Ethical Editorial Oversight & Guest Editor Limitations



- Guest Editors may only publish an editorial** in their Special Issue.
- Guest Editors may submit a **critical review paper** under two strict conditions:
  - The paper must be **exclusively authored by the Guest Editors**—no external co-authors allowed.
  - The paper must be **handled by a journal editor as a regular submission**, without notifying the handling editor that it is authored by Special Issue Guest Editors.
- Each Guest Editor may also submit a **research paper from their own research team** under the following strict condition: The paper must be **handled by a journal editor as a regular submission**, without notifying the handling editor that it is authored by Special Issue Guest Editors.
- The **cover letter must not indicate any association with the Special Issue**, and only the **Person in Charge of Special Issues in the journal or the Editor-in-Chief** should be informed.
- The review/research paper is **not guaranteed acceptance** and may be **desk-rejected or rejected through peer review** like any other submission.
- If accepted**, the paper will be added to the Special Issue collection, **with all information concerning its submission and handling explicitly appearing in the footnote of the first page of the article and on the online version.**
- Guest Editors' honorariums should be a reasonable fraction (e.g., 20-30%) of the annual honorarium of the journal's handling editors, such as Associate Editors, ensuring fair compensation relative to their responsibilities.**

# 5

## Transparent Peer Review & Manuscript Selection



- Journals must enforce a **rigorous, fully independent peer review** process.
- **No invitations to 'friendly reviewers'**: All reviewers must be independent and **selected based on expertise, not personal/professional affiliations** with the authors or editors.
- **Manuscripts should not be pre-approved** based on author invitations; each submission must go through a proper peer-review process.

# 6

## Preventing Manipulation & Citation Fraud



- **Citation stacking and coercive citation requests must be strictly prohibited.** Journals must monitor citation practices to prevent unethical self-promotion.
- Guest Editors should **not** pressure authors to **cite their own work, the journal, or previous Special Issues** to manipulate journal metrics.

# 7

## Disclosure of Processing Fees & Editorial Decisions



- **Special Issues must not become 'pay-to-publish' vehicles.** Processing fees should be clearly disclosed, and fee waivers must be available for authors without institutional funding.
- **Editorial decisions must be justified and documented,** with rejection reasons available for transparency.

# 8

## Author & Reviewer Accountability



- Authors must disclose **any prior rejections** of their work in the same journal or Special Issue to prevent resubmission loopholes.
- Reviewers must be **qualified and unbiased,** and their identities should be disclosed to editorial boards to prevent **fake peer reviews.**

# 9

## Publisher Responsibility & Retraction Protocols



- Publishers must **take full accountability** for Special Issues and **not shift the blame** to Guest Editors alone in cases of misconduct.
- **Retractions should be publicly explained,** and a full investigation should precede mass retractions to avoid harming innocent authors.

# 10

## Periodic Review & Audit of Special Issues



- Journals must **audit Special Issues periodically** to ensure compliance with ethical publishing standards.
- Any **irregularities in peer review, editorial decision-making, or publication patterns** should trigger an investigation.



## Final Point on Editorial Responsibilities

**A second editorial should also be published in the Special Issue by the Person in Charge of Special Issues in the journal or the Editor-in-Chief,** explicitly and effectively elaborating all the guidelines and protocols followed throughout the development of this Special Issue.

However, if established guidelines, such as the "**ScienceGuardians™ Ethical Guidelines for Special Issues,**" have been followed, then a second editorial is not needed. In that case, the guidelines used should be mentioned in the opening of the Special Issue on its online page, for example: "*This Special Issue has been developed in strict compliance with the ScienceGuardians™ Ethical Guidelines for Special Issues.*"