

Editorial

Including Early Career Researchers in Scientific Publishing

Early career researchers (ECRs)—graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and early stage independent investigators—represent the largest fraction of researchers in higher education (Friesenhahn and Beaudry, 2014) yet they are also the most vulnerable (Ledford, 2017; Bansal et al., 2022). One area of particular vulnerability and pressure is scientific publishing. ECRs often lack experience in navigating the publishing process independently, as trainees may rely on senior investigators to handle many aspects of the peer review and publishing processes. Additionally, early career investigators are seldom integrated into the core of scientific publishing, creating a gap between journals and the upcoming force of future scientific research. Yet, ECRs have the potential to bring fresh scientific perspectives, giving rise to innovative approaches that can enrich journal content and attract a wider readership. Additionally, their expertise in digital media and platforms presents journals with a chance to strengthen their online presence, connect with younger readerships, and adopt new publishing formats.

To address the gap between journals and ECRs, *The Journal of Neuroscience* (*JNeurosci*) launched the Early Career Researcher Advisory Board in 2023 (Kastner, 2023), composed of ECRs from different career stages. The overarching goal of the Board is to identify challenges faced in the publishing process unique to ECRs and make recommendations to the Editorial Board on solutions. The Board is also aimed at enhancing visibility, inclusivity, and diversity in neuroscientific publishing (Yadav et al., 2020; Patt et al., 2022) and lowering publishing barriers for ECRs. We believe the needs of ECRs can be met by (1) promoting existing journal resources for ECRs, (2) creating programs targeted at ECRs, and (3) providing our perspective on current and future initiatives to improve the publication and peer review experience for all researchers. Below we have outlined a few of our initial efforts while working with the *JNeurosci* Editorial Board to bridge the gaps.

We aim to highlight the features of *JNeurosci* that make it a welcoming place for ECRs looking to publish their work in a rigorous, affordable, and timely manner. These include access to a strong and experienced reviewer pool, availability of publication fee vouchers for ECRs in need (see Reduced Fees Policy at <https://www.jneurosci.org/content/information-authors#fees>), training opportunities from a strong and experienced editorial team (see the Reviewer Mentor Program at <https://www.jneurosci.org/rmp>), and a fast average time from submission to decision (current median: 32 d). We will work alongside Senior Editors to develop resources to inform ECRs about the publication process and how publication fees support both journal and larger SfN initiatives. We want to encourage discussions between ECRs and senior researchers by offering platforms for divergent perspectives. We aim to give perspective on what features matter to ECRs when interacting with online publications and advise the development of submission guidelines as they pertain to how modern writing and editing tools (such as AI language models) can and cannot be leveraged. We also hope to promote and build on existing opportunities for graduate students and postdocs, including

Journal Club articles and the Reviewer Mentor Program (Picciotto 2018, Esch and Kastner, 2023), allowing them to network and share their scientific insights with the *JNeurosci* audience.

We believe the *JNeurosci* ECR Advisory Board will benefit not only ECRs, but also the future of *JNeurosci* and the research community across all stages. Through the work of the ECR Board, *JNeurosci* will be able to provide essential guidance, mentorship, and access to editorial resources, empowering ECRs to publish high-quality manuscripts and navigate peer review effectively. This will benefit ECRs by shaping scientific publishing practices to align more closely to their interests. Concurrently, the ECRs' advisory board will bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to the journal, promoting initiatives tailored to ECRs and the wider community. The ECR Advisory Board will be instrumental in broadening the audience of the journal, attracting new authors, and ensuring *JNeurosci* can effectively address the needs of all authors in a dynamic and fast-paced research future.

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<https://doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.0907-24.2024>

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