PERFORMANCE WORK STATEMENT
PEER REVIEW SUPPORT AND ADVISORY SERVICES – *JOURNAL OF REPLICATION AND REPRODUCIBILITY*
NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

1. BACKGROUND: The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is preparing to launch a new scholarly journal and publishing platform focused on the reproducibility space. The *Journal of Replication and Reproducibility* (*JRR*) will address a major gap in scientific publishing: the lack of incentives, visibility, and infrastructure for replication research. By sponsoring replication studies as well as publishing studies from outside groups and authors, and combining full-service publication with an integrated open and interactive repository for data, methods, software, and materials for both internal and external studies, *JRR* will become a trusted global platform for transparent and verifiable science.

JRR will be an online only, diamond open-access scientific journal and platform dedicated to publishing direct replication studies, conceptual replication studies, reproducibility analyses, null results and negative findings, and registered replication reports. Each paper will be accompanied by a mandatory, permanent repository hosted by *JRR* that includes all supporting materials necessary to replicate and validate the claims made in the paper.

As a diamond open-access journal, *JRR* will have no author publication charges, no pay-per-view purchases, and no subscriptions. All content will be freely available to anyone visiting the website, as all costs will be covered by the NIH.

1.1. Current Processes and Specifications: As a new endeavor, there are no existing workflows or procedures attached to this program. All materials will be newly created for *JRR*.

2. OBJECTIVES: The basic service objective is to provide strategic, operational, and advisory services to support the development of a high-quality scholarly publishing program with an emphasis on research integrity, transparency, innovation in peer review, and scientific reproducibility.

As a new endeavor, *JRR* does not have the benefit of an established editorial board, peer review frameworks and procedures, or a recognized presence in the scholarly publishing industry. This requirement will address those gaps to allow for a successful building and launch of the program over the next year.

The objectives of this contract are to:

- Establish a world-class editorial leadership structure.
- Design and validate an open peer-review framework.
- Develop innovative publishing products focused on replication studies and research reproducibility.
- Support the marketing and launch of the journal and associated programs.
- Develop rigorous, ethical, and transparent peer-review policies and workflows.

3. TASKS & DELIVERABLES: The Government will not exercise any supervision or control over the contract service providers performing the services herein. Such contract service providers shall be accountable solely to the contractor who, in turn is responsible to the Government. The contractor, in turn, shall be accountable to the Government for contractor personnel, subcontractors, or contract service providers.

3.1. TASKS: The contractor shall provide the following services:

Task 1 – Editorial Leadership Recruitment and Governance Development: The contractor shall recommend and recruit a qualified Editor-in-Chief, Associate Editors, and Advisory Committee members capable of guiding the journal's scientific direction and ensuring editorial excellence:

Task 1.1 Editorial Structure Development

- Assess journal scope and strategic objectives.
- Define editorial governance structure.
- Develop role descriptions and qualification criteria for:
    - Editor-in-Chief
    - Associate Editors
    - Advisory Committee Members

Task 1.2 Recruitment Strategy Development

- Develop recruitment plan and timeline for approval by JRR leadership.
- Identify institutions, professional societies, and scientific networks to target for viable candidates.
- Create candidate evaluation criteria and scoring framework.

Task 1.3 Candidate Sourcing and Outreach

- Conduct candidate mapping and market research.
- Alongside JRR Communications Team, execute outreach campaigns to prospective candidates.
- Assist in managing inquiries and candidate communications.

Task 1.4 Candidate Evaluation and Selection Support

- Screen applicants and nominees.
- Conduct preliminary interviews.
- Facilitate stakeholder review sessions.
- Prepare shortlists and recommendation reports.
- Support appointment negotiations and onboarding.

Task 2 - Open Peer-Review Focus Groups and Best-Practice Development: The contractor shall develop evidence-based principles and recommendations for implementing an effective open peer-review system:

Task 2.1 Research and Environmental Scan

- Review existing open peer-review models.
- Analyze publisher and society best practices.
- Identify opportunities and risks.

Task 2.2 Focus Group Design

- Develop research objectives.
- Create participant recruitment criteria.
- Prepare discussion guides and survey instruments.

Task 2.3 Focus Group Recruitment and Management

Recruit representatives from:

- Researchers/prospective authors
- Reviewers
- Editors
- Research institutions
- Research integrity specialists
- Funders and policymakers

Task 2.4 Focus Group Execution

- Conduct virtual focus groups or surveys.
- Moderate discussions.
- Collect qualitative and quantitative feedback.

Task 2.5 Analysis and Recommendations

- Analyze findings.
- Identify consensus principles.
- Develop implementation recommendations.

Task 3 – Replication Studies Product Development: The contractor shall develop innovative publishing products and services focused on replication studies, reproducibility, and research verification:

Task 3.1 Market and Opportunity Assessment

- Evaluate demand for replication-focused publishing products.
- Assess competing initiatives and market gaps.
- Identify stakeholder needs.

Task 3.2 Product Concept Development

Develop product concepts and preliminary product roadmaps, including:

- Dedicated replication study article types.
- Registered replication reports.
- Reproducibility validation services.
- Research verification badges and recognition programs.

Task 3.3 Business Model Design

- Assess cost and sustainability options.
- Define operational requirements.
- Develop partnership opportunities.

Task 3.4 Pilot Program Design

- Conceive and design pilot replication-study initiatives.
- Establish submission, review, and publication workflows.
- Develop evaluation metrics.

Task 4 – Marketing Launch Support: In support of the JRR Communications Team, the contractor shall support successful market introduction and adoption of the journal and associated initiatives:

Task 4.1 Positioning and Messaging

- Define journal value proposition.
- Develop key messaging framework.
- Establish brand differentiation strategy.

Task 4.2 Launch Strategy Development

- Advise on launch campaign roadmap.
- Identify target audiences and stakeholder segments.
- Develop communications calendar.

Task 4.3 Marketing Content Support

Assist with development of:

- Website content
- Editorial announcements
- Press materials
- Social media content
- Conference and webinar materials
- Recruitment communications

Task 4.4 Stakeholder Engagement

- Support outreach to researchers and institutions.
- Coordinate launch events and webinars.
- Facilitate ambassador and advocacy programs.

Task 4.5 Performance Monitoring

- Establish launch KPIs.
- Monitor campaign performance.
- Recommend optimization actions.

Task 5 – Open Peer-Review Framework Development: The contractor shall develop an open peer-review model that is rigorous, ethical, transparent, and aligned with best practices in scholarly publishing:

Task 5.1 Open Peer-Review Policy Development

Develop policies addressing:

- Reviewer selection and qualifications, including statistics and data reviews
- Conflict-of-interest management
- Confidentiality and transparency

- Research integrity and misconduct
- Data and methodology review
- Artificial intelligence disclosure and use
- Appeals and complaints processes

Task 5.2 Workflow Design

- Map editorial and review workflows.
- Define reviewer and editor responsibilities.
- Establish quality-control checkpoints.
- Develop escalation procedures.

Task 5.3 Transparency Framework

- Define reviewer identity/conflict-of-interest disclosure options.
- Establish publication of review reports.
- Create standards for editorial decision transparency.

Task 5.4 Ethics and Integrity Framework

- Align processes with industry-recognized publication ethics standards.
- Develop misconduct investigation procedures.
- Establish safeguards against bias and manipulation.

Task 5.5 Training and Implementation Support

- Develop reviewer training materials.
- Conduct editor and reviewer workshops.
- Support implementation and change management.

3.2. DELIVERABLES: The contractor shall provide the following reports/plans as specified below (Also, reference Attachment III and Contract, Section H - Special Contract Requirements, Article H.7):

3.2.1. Deliverables for Task 1:

- Editorial governance framework.
- Position descriptions.
- Recruitment strategy and timeline.
- Candidate longlists and shortlists.
- Interview evaluation reports.
- Appointment recommendations.
- Editorial onboarding materials.

3.2.2. Deliverables for Task 2:

- Focus group research plan.
- Recruitment materials.
- Summary reports for each focus group.
- Open peer-review principles framework.
- Final recommendations report.

3.2.3. Deliverables for Task 3:

- Market assessment report.
- Product concept portfolio.
- Pilot implementation plan.
- Product roadmap.

3.2.4. Deliverables for Task 4:

- Feedback on marketing launch strategy.
- Messaging framework.
- Communications calendar.
- Marketing content recommendations.
- Launch performance dashboard.

3.2.5. Deliverables for Task 5:

- Open peer-review policy manual.
- Editorial workflow documentation.
- Transparency and ethics framework.
- Reviewer and editor guidance documents.
- Training materials and workshops.

4. QUALITY CONTROL: The Government is committed to a highly interactive relationship between quality control by the contractor and quality assurance by the government recipient of services. This relationship shall be achieved through an effective prevention-based quality control program dedicated to ensuring the best possible products and services to end users. The contractor shall provide their written Quality Control Plan (QCP) for evaluation as part of the contractor's proposal. The QCP shall be updated following award. The QCP shall document how the contractor intends on meeting and complying with the quality standards established in this PWS. At a minimum, the QCP shall include a self-inspection plan, an internal staffing plan, and an outline of the procedures that the contractor will use to maintain quality, timeliness, responsiveness, customer satisfaction, and any other requirements set forth in this PWS.

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The contractor's QCP shall be maintained throughout the life of the contract and shall include the contractor's procedures to routinely evaluate the effectiveness of the plan to ensure the contractor is meeting the performance standards and requirements of the contract.

5. COMPLIANCE: All content intended for public use must meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 level AA accessibility guidelines as defined by the federal government. Please see the following URLs for details:

- About WCAG: https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG2AA-Conformance
- How to Meet WCAG: https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG22/quickref/

NOTE: If the deliverable includes features and functions in addition to those identified as requirements, these features and functions also need to conform to relevant WCAG 2.2 AA technical provisions, functional performance criteria, and information, documentation, and support.

6. PHASE-OUT PERIOD: This contract will terminate after 12 months, at the end of its period of performance. No phase-out period is required.

7. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- **Restriction on contractor's use of or dissemination of databases:** Mailing lists either furnished to the contractor by the COR or prepared by the contractor as part of its continuing efforts to support the journal are protected by the Privacy Act, and shall not be used by the contractor or any other third party for any purposes other than for the expressed purpose of this contract. Mailing lists provided as part of this contract shall not be disseminated to other persons or entities, except the COR and CO, and shall not be used by the contractor, its subcontractors, or any other organization of persons for any purpose other than the services specifically described by the PWS and contract document. The contractor shall ensure that all subcontracts and consultant agreements in support of this contract include this restriction.

8. DATA RIGHTS: The Government has unlimited rights to all documents/material produced under this contract to the extent permitted by the data rights clauses. The parties mutually acknowledge their understanding that this is the government's intent. All documents and materials, to include the source codes of any software, if applicable, produced under this contract shall be government owned and are the property of the government with all rights and privileges of ownership/copyright belonging exclusively to the government. These documents and materials may not be used or sold by the contractor without written permission from the contracting officer. All materials supplied to the Government will be the sole property

of the government and may not be used for any other purpose. This right does not abrogate any other government rights.

9. PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE: The period of performance shall be 12-months.

10. HOURS OF OPERATION: The contractor shall be responsible for providing routine services between the core hours of 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM Eastern time Monday through Friday, except federal holidays or when the government facility is closed due to local or national emergencies, administrative closings or similar government directed facility closings. All responses to queries from *JRR* staff and its contractors or associates must be issued in a timely manner, usually the same business day. The contractor shall at all times maintain an adequate workforce for the uninterrupted performance of all tasks defined within this PWS when the government facility is not closed for the above reasons. When hiring personnel, the contractor shall keep in mind that the stability and continuity of the workforce are essential. No overtime (OT) or compensatory time (CT) is authorized under this contract.

10.1. Federal Holidays: The National Institutes of Environmental Health Sciences observes the following holidays:

- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King's Birthday
- Presidents Day
- Memorial Day
- Juneteenth
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Columbus Day
- Veteran's Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Christmas Day

11. PLACE OF PERFORMANCE: The place of performance for all parties directly affiliated with fulfilling the services of this contract shall be within the continental United States.

12. CONTRACTOR PERSONNEL: Contract staff shall illustrate expertise in the following areas:

- Following established best practices for reviewing and evaluating scientific materials for publication.
- Following established best practices for launching a scholarly journal.
- Demonstrated understanding of 508/WCAG 2.2 compliance requirements.
- Existing business relationships in the scientific journal publishing ecosystem.

13. GOVERNMENT FURNISHED PROPERTY, EQUIPMENT, AND SERVICES: This section identifies those items such as property, information and/or services that will be provided for the contractor's use (without cost to the contractor) to allow the contractor to provide the required services, such as materials, facilities, training, etc. as follows:

- Facilities: The Government shall not furnish workspace, work stations, computers.

- Materials: The Government will not provide Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs), applicable regulations, manuals, texts, briefs or any other materials associated with these projects.

- Training: The Government will not provide any training, management, or accountability for contractor's staff beyond the initial guidance given during initial setup, and the ongoing feedback that is provided throughout the course of the contract.

14. CONTRACTOR FURNISHED ITEMS AND RESPONSIBILITIES: The contractor shall furnish all supplies, equipment, and services required to perform work under this contract that are not listed under section 13 of this PWS.

14.1. Items: The contractor shall provide all required hardware, software, licenses, internet access, etc., along with all necessary support, to perform this work. The Government will not provide any equipment, materials, or technical support. The contractor will not have access to the NIH network or email accounts.

When not specified, the contractor is free to select the software/hardware that best fits their needs.

14.2. Security/Security Log: The contractor shall maintain the security and integrity of their systems at all times. This includes promptly installing updates to mitigate security threats, actively testing all software releases for potential security holes, and promptly informing customers of known or suspected data breaches.

15. ATTACHMENT/TECHNICAL EXHIBIT LISTING: This section lists all attachments and technical exhibits applicable to the contract.