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Statement of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) on the Request for Comment – NSF Proposal and Award Procedures Guide

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) is pleased to have this opportunity to comment on the National Science Foundation (NSF) Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide. ASCE strongly endorses the principle of providing public access and enhancing dissemination of federally funded research in ways that advance public health and safety, and strengthen the global quality of life.

It is the Society's objective to advance the science and profession of engineering to enhance the welfare of humanity. As such, among its many endeavors, ASCE is the world's largest publisher of civil engineering information—producing more than 55,000 pages of technical content each year. The ASCE Publications Division produces 33 professional journals (available both in print and online editions), conference proceedings, standards, manuals of practice, committee reports, and monographs under the ASCE Press imprint. Its many other resources for practicing civil engineers include the 170,000-entry Civil Engineering Database, a complete publications catalog, and the ASCE Library, providing online access to over 700,000 pages of journal articles and proceedings papers.

ASCE is primarily concerned that the plan calls for a 12-month embargo, which would seriously impact the ability of ASCE to recover our cost. Compared to many areas of science and technology, civil engineering research moves at a more sedate rate. As such, civil engineering journals remain “fresh” for a longer period, selling over a longer period, and taking a correspondingly longer time for ASCE to re-coop our cost. ASCE believes that a 12-month embargo would impede ASCE's ability to continue to produce the high-quality journals that we currently do.

The Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) guiding memo calls for plans that does not proliferate duplicate copies of works. The proposed NSF plan will result in multiple versions of the same works being posted on the Internet. ASCE believes that multiple versions of the plan would seriously impact the scholarly value of the peer-reviewed version of record. A version that is fixed at its time of presentation without any possibility of historical rewriting; that the original work cannot be altered by the author or anyone else; and that the value of added work by learned societies, acting in accordance with their educational mission, is reimbursed for the investments they make in managing the peer review process, editing, dissemination, publishing, and maintaining an ever-growing archive in perpetuity.

The NSF plan includes conference proceedings, which many times are expanded and published as journal articles. Again, this leads to duplicate versions of results. Once again, thank you for the opportunity for ASCE to comment on the proposed Policies and Guidelines. ASCE, like other engineering and scientific societies, fulfills its role in the advancement of engineering by determining through the peer review process what is worthy of publication. While supporting open access, we must be careful not to lose the “value-added” by peer review is what sets apart top-flight research from mediocre work.

If you have any questions, or if ASCE can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Martin Hight, ASCE’s Senior Manager of Government Relations at mhight@asce.org or 202-789-7843.