

Sustaining Recent Growth in *Sustainability*'s Impact and Quality

Steve W. Lyon 

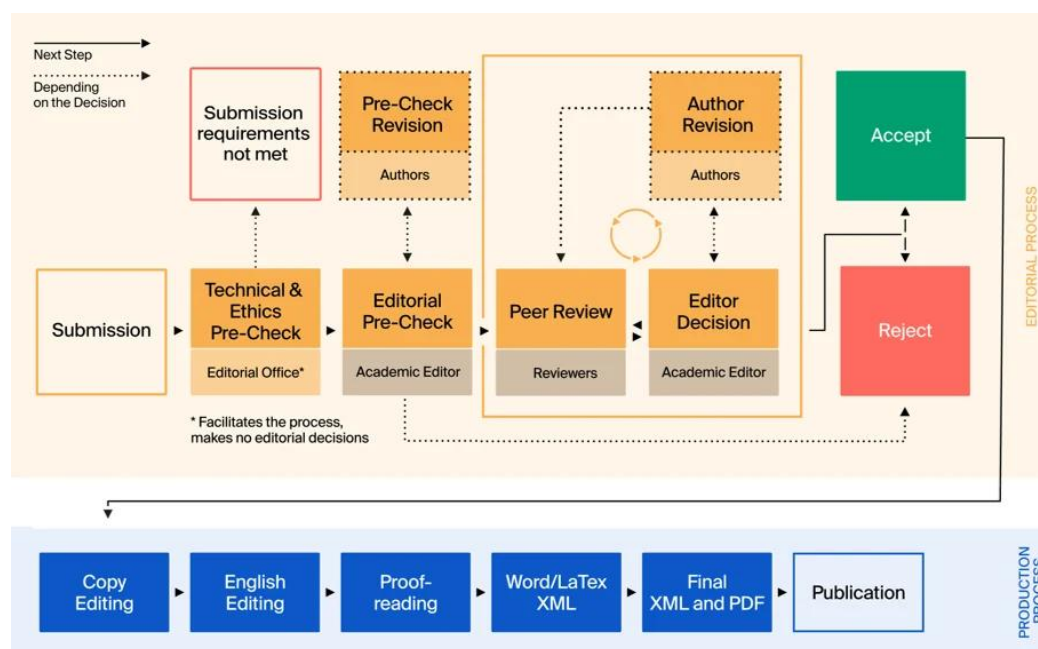
School of Environment and Natural Resources, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210, USA;
lyon.248@osu.edu

1. New Milestones

Sustainability has seen jumps in both our JCR Impact Factor, from 3.3 up to 4.1, and CiteScore, from 7.7 to 8.9 in 2026, marking 11 consecutive years of CiteScore growth. These clear marks of continued improvement in impact and quality are indicative of the dedicated effort of all those involved in the publication process, from editors to reviewers to authors. As we celebrate these milestones, it is important to not only look back at the processes that got us here but also to look forward, considering how we plan to continue improving rigor across the journal.

2. Updated Editorial Workflows

We are rolling out a revised editorial process in *Sustainability* (Figure 1) which we anticipate to go live soon. The updated editorial workflow seeks to tighten rigor around initial in-house reviews, allowing the early removal of lower quality and questionable submissions. Ultimately, this reduces the burden of reviews while simultaneously increasing publication quality across the board.



Received: 21 July 2026

Accepted: 21 July 2026

Published: 23 July 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.

Figure 1. Schematic diagram showing the current editorial process. Full details of the complete process are available on the editorial process page (https://www.mdpi.com/editorial_process, accessed on 16 July 2026).

A key aspect of the journal's new editorial workflow (Figure 2) is pre-checking submissions. Incorporating this step reflects feedback *Sustainability* has received over the past year

concerning how to increase the quality of papers making their way into the review process and better empowering editors at all levels, ensuring expert handling and assessment in the review process. The main impact of this new pre-check workflow is the earlier assessment of initial submission quality by subject experts at the Assistant Editor level. Specifically, this additional step creates a clear pathway for the recommendation of subject-expert reviewers in the handling of submissions and (perhaps even more importantly) a pathway for the removal of spurious, non-expert reviewers.

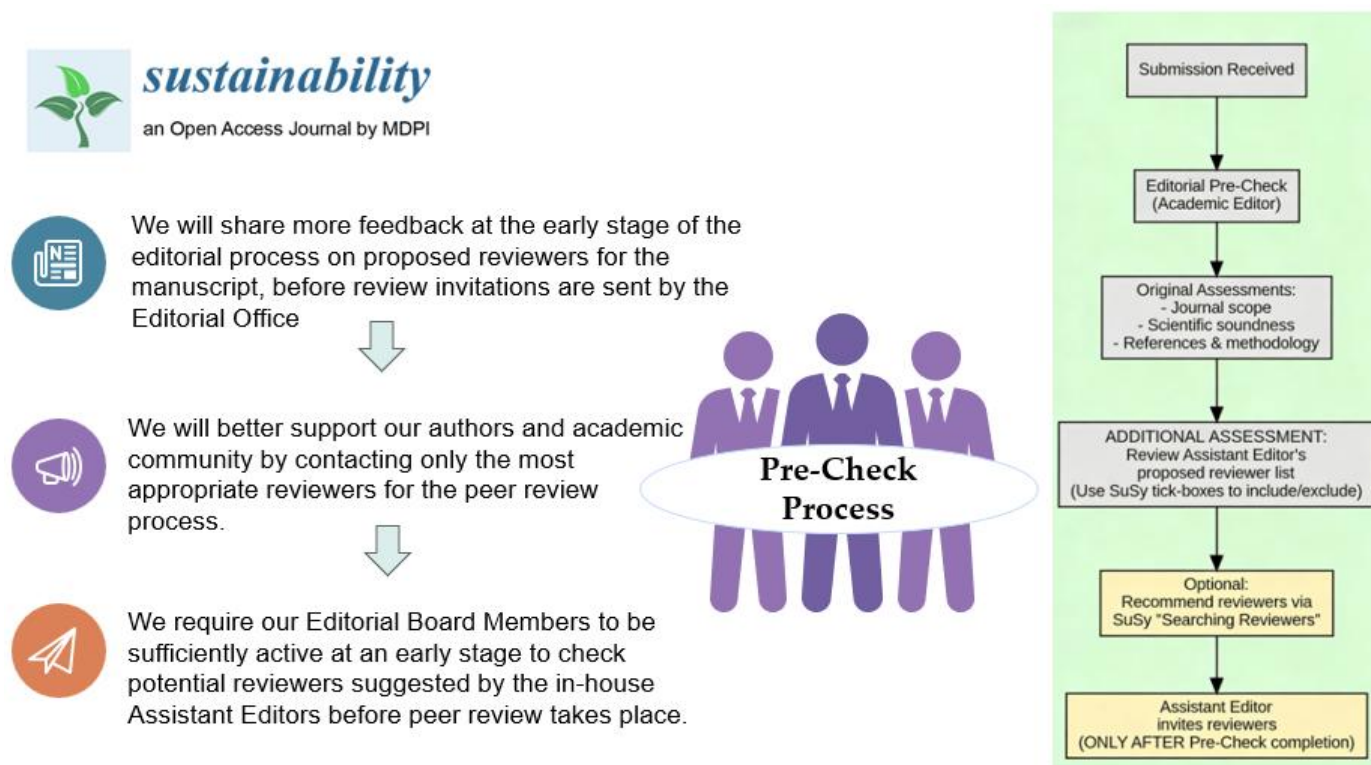


Figure 2. New additions to the pre-check process workflow.

This latter aspect is significant. As many of you know first-hand, one of the most challenging aspects for any level of editor is trying to reconcile conflicting reviewer opinions on the quality of a manuscript. Often times, at least in my personal experience, these conflicts arise when reviews come from a mix of clear subject experts and generalists/non-experts. Of course, non-expert opinions do not hold much credence; however, they do create confusion in the review process, especially from an author viewpoint, and require significantly more effort to address in the long run. The goal of this new workflow is to help remove these conflicting recommendations.

As the new workflow is rolled out, the journal encourages all those involved in the publication process to track any emergent issues. Feedback on these issues can really help increase efficiency.

3. Targeted Reviewer Training

When we think about sustaining the quality and impact of publications in *Sustainability*, it goes without saying that we need to recruit and retain high-quality reviewers. Thinking about reviewer quality, I would like to highlight and thank those involved in *Sustainability's* First Reviewer Club Webinar. You can read more about the event, which occurred 18 June 2026, on our website (<https://sciforum.net/event/Sustainability-25>, accessed on 16 July 2026). This webinar was inspired by feedback from our 2025 Editorial Board survey, where several editors highlighted the importance of strengthening reviewer engagement

and development, and was chaired by Prof. Maria De Nobili (Section Editor-in-Chief, Soil Section), with presentations from Prof. Tim Gray (Editorial Board Member) and Dr. Federico Minelli (Early Career Editorial Board Member).

This inaugural webinar focused on managing complexity around interdisciplinary integration in sustainability research, with an understanding that the dynamic complexity of interactions governing a system makes it more than simply the sum of its parts. Given the challenges around interdisciplinary integration in many fields, the webinar focused not only on how to communicate within interdisciplinary sustainability research but also on how to approach reviewing at the intersection of disciplines. That later aspect is something we see as a core challenge faced by reviewers who offer their service to *Sustainability*, and something we want to help improve. Specifically, the webinar targeted this challenge with training directly around how to provide constructive and efficient peer-review reports for interdisciplinary sustainability research.

As we continue to develop the series, we would be delighted to involve those connected with *Sustainability* as future chairs or speakers. If you have suggestions for future topics or formats, or would be interested in participating in a future session, please feel free to reach out to the journal.

4. Cutting-Edge Hot Topic Highlights

Finally, what can authors do to help sustain the quality and impact of *Sustainability*? Here, we can learn from some of the journal's most impactful publications from the first half of the year.

Peráček and Kaššaj (2026) [1], for example, examined the interdisciplinary use of artificial intelligence, data management and sustainability at the European Union level, including support instruments such as regulatory initiatives and funding programs, assessing their implementation in relation to smart cities. The interplay of governance scales contextualizes this work and allows for a transferable understanding of regulatory- and political-environment impacts on the possibilities of developing smart, climate-neutral and sustainable cities. Poulis et al. (2026) [2] considered digital sustainability signals and the psychological mechanisms (authenticity and trust) that relate to consumers' sustainable food purchase intentions. Their study drills into the mechanisms around influencer credibility and greenwashing perceptions affecting green brand authenticity and, in turn, leading to brand trust and green purchase intentions. Wang et al. (2026) [3] proposed a probabilistic forecasting framework to allow for accurate probabilistic forecasting of photovoltaic (PV) power generation, which is crucial for grid scheduling and renewable energy integration. A key advancement is their consideration of prediction intervals related to systematically coordinating multi-scale temporal modeling and spatial dependency learning, as well as the interdependence among meteorological variables. Finally, Boudalia et al. (2026) [4] reviewed the valorization of agrifood by-products as a pathway toward sustainability and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Their review not only explored current challenges and limitations but also considered emerging innovations such as digitalization, artificial intelligence, and precision fermentation, that can drive the sustainable transformation of agri-food systems.

These studies clearly benefit from targeting the cutting edge of sustainability science. Beyond that targeted focus, they collectively employ techniques and strategies to help ensure the quality of science and, subsequently, help position the publications for larger impact. Despite their obvious differences, central themes emerge through these recent, high-impact studies, such as (1) an ability to isolate mechanisms for better understanding, (2) consideration of cross-scale interactions to improve the transferability of findings, (3) quantification of modeling uncertainty, allowing for more confident and robust predic-

tions, and (4) clear efforts to look towards the future rather than defaulting to the status quo. Bringing these aspects to our work as we remember the need for cross-disciplinary approaches within sustainability science is what will help sustain impact and quality growth for *Sustainability*.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

1. Peráček, T.; Kaššaj, M. Strategic Management of Urban Services Using Artificial Intelligence in the Development of Sustainable Smart Cities—Managerial and Legal Challenges. *Sustainability* **2026**, *18*, 582. [[CrossRef](#)]
2. Poulis, A.; Theodoridis, P.; Zacharatos, T. Green Branding in the Digital Era: The Role of Influencer Credibility and Greenwashing in Shaping Brand Authenticity, Trust and Purchase Intentions. *Sustainability* **2026**, *18*, 451. [[CrossRef](#)]
3. Wang, G.; Zhou, Y.; Yan, Y.; Zhou, Z.; Yang, Z.; Dai, L.; Huang, J. Probabilistic Photovoltaic Power Forecasting with Reliable Uncertainty Quantification via Multi-Scale Temporal–Spatial Attention and Conformalized Quantile Regression. *Sustainability* **2026**, *18*, 739. [[CrossRef](#)]
4. Boudalia, S.; Symeon, G.K.; Dots, V.; Gueboudji, Z.; Kouadri, I.; Sehili, B.; Terfa, M.T.; Smeti, S.; Gueroui, Y.; Bousbia, A. The Valorization of Agrifood Byproducts and Waste to Advance the Sustainable Development Goals: Current State and New Perspectives. *Sustainability* **2026**, *18*, 2165. [[CrossRef](#)]

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.