

Dear AAAI Community,

Reviewer bidding is intended to help assignment systems match papers with reviewers who have relevant expertise and genuine interest in the topic. It is not intended to be used as a mechanism for reciprocal advantage, coordinated manipulation, or gaming of the assignment process.

We have received reports and supporting evidence suggesting that off-platform discussions may be attempting to coordinate bidding behavior to create reciprocal assignment structures, including 2-cycles (i.e., an author of Paper A reviews Paper B, while an author of Paper B reviews Paper A). While such structures can occur naturally, coordinated bidding pacts are deeply concerning because they create the appearance – or the reality – of collusion in the review process. When authors coordinate bids in concert, it increases the likelihood that assignment algorithms construct these reciprocal author-reviewer loops, undermining the integrity of peer review. We are taking these reports seriously and reviewing them through the AAAI ethics process.

As a first step in our coordinated response, AAAI-27 will do the following:

1. **Hard Constraint on “Strong” (i.e., Mutual-Bidding) 2-Cycles:** We will enforce a strict, hard constraint in the matching algorithm to eliminate all 2-cycles resulting from mutual bids during the bulk Phase I and Phase II assignment runs.
2. **Soft Constraint on “Weak” (i.e., Non-Bidding) 2-Cycles:** For non-bidding 2-cycles that emerge naturally due to narrow domain expertise or reviewer capacity bounds, the matching algorithm will apply a heavy penalty (i.e., soft constraint) to suppress their formation during initial matching.
3. **Auditing Protocol for Residual 2-Cycles:** For all weak 2-cycles, as well as any strong 2-cycles created post-bulk assignment (e.g., out of operational pragmatism when onboarding emergency reviewers), the Program Committee will audit the resulting reviews for anomalous or unsupported scoring patterns.

As a reminder, the AAAI-27 Call for Papers explicitly warned participants in the peer review process that “seeking or arranging reciprocal reviewing to inflate scorers” may result in AAAI imposing “penalties ranging from desk rejection of papers to multi-year bans from participation in AAAI conferences including but not limited to the offending authors or area chairs.”

We encourage community members to continue reporting concrete concerns through the official AAAI ethics channel. Reports are most effective when accompanied by specific evidence that can be reviewed responsibly and confidentially.

Our shared goal remains a fair, trustworthy, and rigorous review process for all authors and reviewers.

Sincerely,

Matthew Gombolay, AAAI-27 Ethics Chair
Balaraman Ravindran, AAAI-27 Program Co-Chair
Yan Liu, AAAI-27 Program Co-Chair

Bistra Dilkina, AAAI-27 Associate Program Co-Chair
Kevin Leyton-Brown, AAAI-27 Conference Committee Chair
Susan L. Epstein, AAAI Council Ethics Chair