

RICE ECONOMIC FORUM

Research Publication Criteria & Guidelines

Governing Standards for REF Working Papers & Research Submissions

Issued by	Chair of Research & Graduate Relations
Oversight	Auditor-General & Executive Council
Applies to	All full and affiliate members submitting research
Effective	Academic Year 2025–26 and thereafter
Review cycle	Annual — ratified by Executive Council each fall

Adopted in furtherance of Article I, Section I.C.4 and Article III, Section III.B.11 of the REF Constitution

1. Purpose & Scope

The Rice Economic Forum (REF) is committed, under Article I.C.4 of its Constitution, to promoting undergraduate and graduate research in economics, commerce, and trade at Rice University. These guidelines establish the criteria and procedures by which research produced by REF members may be reviewed, approved, and published under the REF banner.

Publication under the REF brand confers institutional endorsement and connects authors with the Forum's network of faculty, alumni, and professional partners. Accordingly, all submissions are held to the standards set forth herein.

1.1 Scope of Application

These guidelines apply to:

- Undergraduate and graduate research papers submitted for publication in the REF Working Paper Series
- Policy briefs, economic analyses, and commentary pieces submitted for the REF Blog or newsletter
- Any research produced jointly by REF members that is to carry the REF name or logo
- Presentations of research at REF-organized symposia or external conferences on behalf of REF

1.2 What These Guidelines Do Not Cover

Individual coursework, theses, or dissertations submitted to Rice University academic programs are not governed by these guidelines, even if the author is an REF member, unless the author explicitly elects to submit to the REF publication process.

2. Author Eligibility

Consistent with Article II of the REF Constitution, eligibility to publish under the REF Working Paper Series is as follows:

2.1 Lead Authors

The lead (first-listed) author must be a current full member of the Rice Economic Forum, as defined in Article II.B.1 of the Constitution, at the time of submission. Full membership requires

consistent attendance at general body meetings (at least half of each semester's meetings) and is confirmed by the General Secretary.

2.2 Co-Authors

Co-authors may be:

- Full members or affiliate members of REF
- Graduate students or faculty at Rice University
- Alumni or associates of REF, as defined in Articles II.B.2 and II.B.3

Co-authors who are not full members of REF may not alone satisfy the lead-author requirement. At least one full member must appear as a named lead or co-author on every submission.

2.3 Sponsored Submissions

In exceptional cases, the Chair of Research and Graduate Relations, with approval of the Executive Council, may invite a faculty member, alumnus, or affiliate to submit a solo paper that does not have a student co-author. Such submissions must be designated "Sponsor Contribution" and are subject to all other guidelines herein.

3. Publication Categories

REF publications are divided into three categories. Authors must designate a category at the time of submission.

Category	Description	Typical Length
Working Paper	Original empirical or theoretical economic research with methodology and analysis	4,000 – 15,000 words
Policy Brief	Evidence-based analysis of an economic policy issue with a clear recommendation	1,500 – 4,000 words
Economic Commentary	Informed opinion, data-driven commentary, or literature synthesis on a current economic topic	800 – 2,500 words

4. Academic & Quality Criteria

All submissions must satisfy the following standards, evaluated by the REF Review Committee (see Section 6).

4.1 Originality

- The work must be the original output of the named author(s) and must not have been previously published in another journal, platform, or course for academic credit at Rice without disclosure.
- Submissions must not reproduce substantial portions of prior work by the same or other authors without proper citation and contextualization.
- Authors must attest, at the time of submission, that the work is original and that all sources are properly cited.

4.2 Academic Rigor

- Working Papers must include a clear statement of the research question, a review of relevant literature, a described methodology, presented results, and a discussion of limitations.
- Empirical claims must be supported by data from verifiable, reputable sources. Data sources must be cited in full.
- Quantitative analyses must include sufficient methodological detail for independent replication.
- Policy Briefs must ground recommendations in evidence and acknowledge counterarguments.
- Economic Commentary must distinguish clearly between factual claims and the author's interpretation or opinion.

4.3 Relevance & Alignment with REF Mission

Submissions must address a topic within the broad field of economics, commerce, trade, public policy with economic dimensions, or an interdisciplinary area with substantial economic content. The REF Chair of Research and Graduate Relations shall make the initial determination of scope relevance, with appeal to the Executive Council.

4.4 Academic Integrity

- All submissions are subject to plagiarism screening prior to review.

- The use of generative AI tools must be disclosed in an author’s note. AI may be used for editing, formatting, or as a research aid, but the intellectual contribution and analytical conclusions must be the author’s own.
- Fabrication or falsification of data or citations constitutes grounds for immediate rejection and referral to the REF Auditor-General under Article III.B.6 of the Constitution.

4.5 Language & Clarity

- Papers must be written in clear, professional academic English.
- Authors whose first language is not English are encouraged to seek editorial assistance from the Chair for Academics and Professional Development before submission.
- Jargon should be defined upon first use; abbreviations should be spelled out in full at first reference.

5. Formatting Requirements

All submissions must conform to the following formatting standards to ensure consistency across REF publications.

5.1 Document Format

File type	.docx or .pdf; both must be submitted
Font	Times New Roman 12pt (body); 14pt for section headings
Line spacing	Double-spaced (Working Papers); 1.5 (Policy Briefs and Commentary)
Margins	1 inch on all sides
n style	Chicago Author-Date (preferred) or APA 7th edition. Must be consistent throughout.
Page numbers	Required on all pages; bottom-center or bottom-right

5.2 Required Sections (Working Papers)

Working Papers must include the following sections in the order listed:

1. Title page: paper title, author name(s), author affiliation (“Rice Economic Forum” and Rice University department/school), date, and abstract (150–250 words)
2. Keywords: three to six keywords following the abstract
3. Introduction: context, research question, significance, and paper structure
4. Literature Review: survey of relevant prior work

5. Methodology: data sources, analytical approach, and justification
6. Results: findings presented clearly, with tables/figures as appropriate
7. Discussion: interpretation of results, limitations, and future research directions
8. Conclusion: summary of contributions
9. References: complete bibliography in the chosen citation style
10. Appendices (if applicable): supplementary data, code, or extended tables

5.3 Required Sections (Policy Briefs & Commentary)

Policy Briefs and Economic Commentaries must include:

- A descriptive title and author byline
- An executive summary or introductory paragraph (for Policy Briefs)
- Clearly labelled sections with headings
- A bibliography or works-cited list
- A brief author biography (2–3 sentences) at the end

5.4 Figures, Tables & Data

- All figures and tables must be numbered sequentially and captioned.
- Data visualizations must include axis labels, units, and the source of the underlying data.
- Tables and figures must be referred to in the text before they appear.
- Where original datasets are used, authors are encouraged to provide a data appendix or a link to a public repository.

6. Review Process

The REF employs a structured internal review process, overseen by the Chair of Research and Graduate Relations in coordination with the Auditor-General and the Executive Council.

6.1 Review Committee Composition

The REF Review Committee shall be convened for each submission cycle and shall consist of:

- The Chair of Research and Graduate Relations (standing chair of the committee)
- At least one faculty advisor or faculty affiliate nominated by the Sponsor
- One additional full member of REF in good standing, who is not the submitting author
- Optionally, a graduate student reviewer nominated by the Chair

The Auditor-General shall verify that the committee's composition and process comply with this document and the REF Constitution.

6.2 Submission Window & Timeline

Milestone	Timing
Submission window opens	Week 3 of each semester (fall and spring)
Submission deadline	Week 8 of each semester
Eligibility & completeness check	Within 5 business days of submission
Initial review decision	Within 3 weeks of the submission deadline
Author revisions (if requested)	3 weeks from receipt of reviewer comments
Final decision	Within 2 weeks of receiving revised submission
Publication	End-of-semester release cycle

6.3 Review Criteria

Reviewers shall assess each submission against four dimensions:

- Originality & Contribution — Does the work make a meaningful new contribution to its topic area?
- Rigor & Evidence — Are claims supported by appropriate data, logic, or literature?
- Clarity & Presentation — Is the paper well-written and does it follow the formatting requirements?
- Relevance to REF Mission — Does the work advance dialogue, research, or professional development in economics at Rice?

6.4 Possible Decisions

- Accept — Paper is accepted for publication with no or only minor copy-editing required.
- Accept with Revisions — Paper is accepted in principle subject to satisfactory revisions specified by reviewers.
- Revise and Resubmit — Paper requires substantial revision; resubmission will undergo a further round of review.
- Reject — Paper does not meet the minimum standards for REF publication. Authors may resubmit in a future cycle with a substantially revised paper.

6.5 Confidentiality & Conflict of Interest

All review proceedings are confidential. Reviewers must recuse themselves from any submission in which they have a direct personal or academic conflict of interest. Consistent with Article VII.A.3 of the REF Constitution, the review process shall not create any conflict of interest or the appearance thereof.

7. Submission Procedure

7.1 How to Submit

11. Prepare your submission in accordance with Section 5 of these guidelines.
12. Complete the REF Submission Form (available from the General Secretary or the REF website). The form will collect: author name(s), member status confirmation, category designation, abstract, and an academic integrity declaration.
13. Email your .docx and .pdf files, along with your completed submission form, to the REF General Secretary at the address published on the REF website. The subject line must read: “REF Submission – [Category] – [Short Title]”
14. You will receive an acknowledgement of receipt within three business days. If you do not, contact the Chair of Research and Graduate Relations directly.

7.2 Anonymous Review

Working Papers undergo blind review. Authors must submit two versions: one complete version and one with all identifying information removed (author name, acknowledgements, and any self-identifying references replaced with “[Author]”).

7.3 Withdrawal

Authors may withdraw a submission at any time prior to the final acceptance decision by notifying the General Secretary in writing. Withdrawals after acceptance require approval from the Chair of Research and Graduate Relations.

8. After Publication

8.1 REF Attribution

Published papers must carry the following attribution: “Published by the Rice Economic Forum, Rice University.” Authors remain the intellectual rights holders of their work. Publication in REF’s

Working Paper Series does not preclude subsequent submission to external academic journals, provided the author discloses prior REF publication to the receiving journal.

8.2 Author Responsibilities Post-Publication

- Authors must notify the Chair of Research and Graduate Relations if they become aware of any factual error or material omission in their published work.
- Where a significant error is identified post-publication, the REF may issue an erratum or, in severe cases, retract the paper at the decision of the Executive Council following review by the Auditor-General.

8.3 Promotion & Dissemination

The Outreach Director, in coordination with the Chair of Research and Graduate Relations, shall promote published REF papers through the Forum's communication channels. Authors are encouraged to share their published work and may request REF support in presenting research at appropriate venues, consistent with Article I.C.5 of the Constitution.

9. Conduct & Enforcement

Any breach of these guidelines — including academic dishonesty, plagiarism, or misrepresentation of author eligibility — shall be referred to the REF Auditor-General for investigation under Article III.B.6.1 of the Constitution. Depending on severity, consequences may include rejection or retraction of the submitted work, suspension of submission privileges, or referral for disciplinary proceedings under the REF Constitution and Rice University's Code of Student Conduct.

10. Amendments to These Guidelines

These guidelines are subordinate to the REF Constitution and shall be reviewed annually by the Chair of Research and Graduate Relations in the first month of the fall semester. Proposed amendments must be approved by a majority vote of the Executive Council. Any amendment that conflicts with the REF Constitution is void and shall not take effect. The Auditor-General shall ensure compliance with this requirement under Article III.B.6.1 of the Constitution.

Adopted by the REF Executive Council

President, Rice Economic Forum

Date: _____

Chair, Research & Graduate Relations

Date: _____

Auditor-General, Rice Economic Forum

Date: _____

Sponsor, Rice Economic Forum

Date: _____

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