

Answers to Committee Questions

Is there a company procedure that is followed? What is it? How long does it take for approval?

Elsevier has procedure that is followed. This policy has been in place since July, 2015 without alteration. It does also rely as well on a broader RELX (Corporate Level) policy regarding open source. Due to changes in executive IT leadership, it did actually take us about two years to get the policy approved as written, requiring several rewrites during that time. Prior to the approval of this policy, Elsevier employees were allowed to use open source software, but were not allowed to publish open source software while doing work for Elsevier.

The policy specifies using a homegrown approval tool (referred to as the IAW "Impact Analysis Worksheet) that had been used in part of Elsevier for both open source and proprietary software approvals for many years. This tool was actually originally written within LexisNexis and is currently maintained for Elsevier. The plan is that as TIO gets up and fully functioning that they will provide a new, more modern tool to use. Once that happens, the Open Source policy will be updated to reflect using the tool, although the principles of the policy will remain the same.

In essence, the policy requires approval from Architecture, Legal, and Security before a new open source system/library is allowed to be used anywhere in the company. This is independent of whether this use is on someone's desktop, used during the development process, or in one of our many production software environments. This also applies whether the use is within our Technology team or in other parts of Elsevier outside of Technology.

As far as publishing open source software, the policy requires the same approvals, with two additional steps required. One is that the code itself must be reviewed by a Sr. Technical engineer along with an architect. The second step is that permission to publish the software then must finally be approved by executive Technology management (CTO or one of his direct reports). Once this has happened, it is permissible to publish the software.

For approval of using open source software, our goal is get approval in 2 weeks. This does vary though based on the number of requests we have in the queue, as they are mixed in with requests for approval of purchased software as well. We have worked to minimize the amount of information that needs provided in the request, however often times the submitter doesn't supply the necessary information. This also causes delays in getting their request through in a timely manner.

How does Elsevier decide what code to make public?

The policy does not dictate what code to make public as this really has to be determined on a case-by-case basis. To date, it has been self-motivation of the open source author to move for publishing their code. There are some restrictions requiring that the code does not contain any item that could be interpreted as Elsevier Intellectual property, commercially sensitive information, or restricted information. Most of the open source packages that have been published to date have been smaller tools or packages. Elsevier has not made any strategic moves to publish whole systems/environments such as LexisNexis has done with HPCC.

Do you have any lesson's learned about the process you follow to make software available?

- Work to make the process as streamlined as possible. Submitters will get frustrated with delays and work around the process.
- Automate as much as possible. We do have a nice email notification system built into ours. However, it needs enhanced to email on a frequent basis until approval is granted, or a question for missing information is supplied.
- Supply a modern interface that is easily accessible.
- Know who the decision makers are and make them accountable. We have this ironed out for approving use of open software, but when a request is made to publish open source software, it is often more difficult to get the final approval.
- Elsevier has not established any kind of central portal for our published open source software. This is left up to each author to figure out. This would be good for Elsevier if we added this to our process.

Any positive / negative experiences with making software available?

We haven't heard of any negative experiences. We have published a couple of packages and continues to see good use of them.