

Editorial Boards: How Do They Function? How Should They Function?

Chair:

Robert Quencer

American Journal of Neuroradiology

Miami, Florida

Panelists:

David Bruns

Clinical Chemistry

Charlottesville, Virginia

David Perrin

Journal of Athletic Training

Charlottesville, Virginia

Reporter:

Romayne McKnight Thompson

Journal of Pelvic Surgery

Rochester, Minnesota

As a first-time editor-in-chief, Robert Quencer appointed an editorial board, assuming that appointees would know what was expected of them. When that was proved wrong and because no published material existed on recommended activities of editorial boards, he developed a simple, short survey and sent it to 97 CBE editors. He received a 54% (N = 52) response.

The survey revealed the following:

- Editors-in-chief spend at least 50% of their professional time in journal work.
- About 45% of editor-in-chief positions are salaried.
- About 92% of journals surveyed have associate or deputy editors, but only 20% of these are paid.
- Most editorial-board members (80%) are selected by the editor-in-chief; other means of selecting members are related to positions that members hold in the society sponsoring the publication.
- About 50% of the journals have nonsociety members on their editorial boards.
- About 70% have defined terms of board appointment, usually 3 years.

- Editorial-board members receive no direct financial compensation.
- The primary functions of editorial boards include writing editorials, commenting on special issues, and serving as high-volume reviewers of submitted articles. Some editorial boards evaluate managing editors and publishers, critique their journal and the review process, do long-term planning for the journal, and discuss special features

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and financial issues.

One of the major responsibilities of the editor-in-chief, said Quencer, is communicating with editorial-board members and evaluating their performance. He recommended that this communication be written to prevent misinterpretation.

David Perrin, founding editor of one journal and a new editor of an established journal, discussed the makeup of editorial boards:

- Associate editors and board members are selected for expertise; associate editors are also chosen for their potential as future editors-in-chief.
- Performance as a manuscript reviewer, expertise, and quality of articles submitted in the past are considered when board members are to be invited.
- Name recognition versus productivity as a board member is a consideration, as are sex and ethnicity, society politics, and availability to attend annual meetings.
- A specified term of appointment is useful

in recruiting; staggered terms are important for journal continuity.

David Bruns outlined the functions of editorial boards and the duties of membership, and he shared concepts of strategic planning and policy issues. Specific duties assigned to board members at his journal, said Bruns, include jobs as editorials editor, book-review editor, reviews editor, and chair of the ethics committee. He recommended that a mechanism exist to replace board members whose contributions are minimal. He favors weekend retreat meetings of the board to brainstorm as a group and work on issues of policy. He also relies on board members to suggest new board members.

When asked about the volunteers who don't do a good job, Bruns said that they are asked to do new jobs, and if they don't want to or can't, they usually quit. Term appointments that include the phrase "annually renewable" allow easier replacement of noncontributing board members.

It was suggested during general discussion that a letter of invitation for editorial-board membership include terms of board responsibilities and the "annually renewable" clause. It was recognized that with the diversity of background of CBE membership, there is no singular, applicable model to define specific aspects of editorial-board makeup and duties, although some general duties as mentioned herein would apply. Quencer suggested that CBE survey members for information on the responsibilities of editorial-board assistants and for information regarding reimbursements for editors and associate editors and how it should be determined. Quencer said that a professional company that deals with survey questionnaires and data analysis should be employed and that a request for a proposal to that end would be appropriate. ■