

◆ *Forming Editorial Boards and Working with Them*

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Amsterdam, the Netherlands

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Almost all journals have editorial boards, but what does an editorial board mean to a journal? Which qualifications are best for editorial-board members? How are the right editorial-board members selected? Does the editorial board have an influence on the journal's impact factor?

Editorial-board members serve many

important roles in a journal "family". They support the editors and the journal, provide topical expertise, and offer geographically diverse perspectives. The structure and function of the board are often affected by the size and workload of the journal. Some editors rely on board members to review all submitted manuscripts and to set policy; other editors keep their boards at arm's length, calling on them only when a problem arises.

Because few journals can afford to compensate members financially, other benefits are helpful.

Editorial-board positions are prestigious. Selection is based on a variety of criteria, including expertise, performance on past reviews, publication record, and geographic location; and each appointee should bring something unique to the journal. Small journals seeking more visibility often look for people who are well known in the field to help draw in readers and authors. However, more-general scientific journals need experts in a variety of fields spanning medicine and surgery. Clinicians can help a journal address clinical relevance when appropriate, enhancing the publication's value in readers' eyes. A mix of established, well-connected academicians and young researchers is desirable; particularly welcome are enthusiastic, motivated experts

with engaging personalities, who are likely to contribute substantially to the journal.

Terms of appointments are generally 3 or 4 years, which is considered long enough to evaluate the board member's involvement. Naturally, some members will be more productive than others, but those who are not contributing are eligible for dismissal.

Board members want to feel that they are important to the journal family and that their opinions are valued. One way to ensure that is to maintain discussion with board members via a listserv. Because few journals can afford to compensate members financially, other benefits are helpful. These may include a letter of commendation to the member's chair from the editor, recognition at the member's association's annual meeting, and covering expenses to board meetings.

Editorial-board members are believed to contribute to a journal's impact factor by improving international visibility and by submitting their own best work and encouraging colleagues to do the same. They can represent the journal at important conferences and facilitate contacts. Therefore, editors should consider appointing, in addition to mainstream experts, board members from less-developed countries to promote diversity.

When the journal publishes an item that offends the owners or jeopardizes profits, the board can be instrumental in defending the editor's editorial independence. And according to Richard Horton, editorial-board members provide an additional service to editors: therapy. ☺