

## *Journal Publishing 101: A Review of the Fundamentals for Governing Board Members*

*Moderator:*

**Mark Johnson**  
Chair, Governing Board  
*American Journal of Preventive  
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Golden, Colorado

*Panelist:*

**Bill Silberg**  
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New York, New York

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The session began with Bill Silberg's review of scholarly publishing's long history, from "erudite letters" in the 17th century to the appearance of specialty journals in the 1800s and more than 10,000 biomedical journals published today. The communication of science requires the participation of many groups—editors, governing boards, editorial staff, specialty societies, publishers, and printers. Silberg provided an overview of the publishing process for governing board members that elucidated how and why we—in the words of Michael Faraday—"Work. Finish. Publish."

There are many models of journal governance, according to Silberg, some fairly complex. All journals have an internal administrative structure that oversees day-to-day operations. Most have some kind of editorial board, and many are also governed by another board or committee. In most cases, the editorial board (or editorial or scientific advisory board) focuses on content and editorial issues, whereas the governing board oversees business issues and how the journal fits with its publisher's overall mission and goals.

The editor is a key player with a close relationship to the board (or boards). He or she juggles many relationships, including those with editorial staff, reviewers, authors, publishers, advertisers, and readers. One important relationship is often with the society. Silberg noted that the degree to which the journal advances society interests is a strategic decision, but personalities are often a key factor in success or conflict. Any journal is a huge professional and economic asset to a society. Its credibility is vital, stated Silberg—tough to build but easy to break. Silberg offered several strategies for avoiding problems. The journal needs a clear governance structure, guidelines, and rules, and everyone must understand the mission, vision, goals, and metrics. Frequent communication and transparency establish and nurture trust so that when disagreements occur (which they inevitably will), the groups involved can work things out. The differences Silberg discussed—between the editorial side and the publisher—can encompass both business questions and issues of policy. They may also include politics, depending, for instance, on the degree to which a society owner wants the journal to reflect and support the society's needs. In the event that more serious conflicts arise, journals will benefit from having a formal conflict-resolution process.

Besides understanding the organizational structure of the journal, Silberg observed, board members need to understand the journal's standards and philosophy. Scientific journals uphold important editorial standards governing peer review and covering such topics as authorship, conflict of interest, editorial independence, and accountability. Professional organizations of editors (for example, in the medical publishing field, the International

Committee of Medical Journal Editors, the World Association of Medical Editors, and the Council of Science Editors) evaluate editorial policies and attempt to create standards that all journals may accept and follow.

The store of knowledge about peer review is growing, and Silberg noted that such programs as the Peer Review Congress are a good source of research and ideas about peer review's role in scientific communication. Silberg outlined the decision-making process of peer reviewers and editors, who decide whether papers comply with criteria for publishing by asking specific questions: Is it original? Is it important? Is it a valid study? Are the conclusions justified? Is it interesting? Is it timely? Is it clearly written? Depending on the structure of the organization, editorial-board members themselves might be involved with manuscripts, serving as reviewers. If the journal has a separate governing board or publication committee, Silberg noted, those members will be interested in editorial issues but will not try to impose those interests. Rather, they will weigh in on broader issues of policy, mission, and governance.

Silberg's message for the attendees was consistent and clear: Boards of all types (editorial and governing) have an important job, and a culture of communication, openness, and trust will facilitate the journal's success. Working closely with the editors, society, and staff, board members can ensure that their journal meets the main objective—to communicate science effectively. 🗨️